

Irony in the Bible

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Irony in the Bible

Between Subversion and Innovation

Edited by

Tobias Häner
Virginia Miller
Carolyn J. Sharp



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Abbreviations

ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	<i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> . Edited by David Noel Freedman. 6 vols. New York: Doubleday, 1992
ABR	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
AcBib	Academia Biblica
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
AOTC	Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries
BBB	Bonner biblische Beiträge
BBR	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BCE	before the Common Era
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
<i>Bib</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BibInt</i>	<i>Biblical Interpretation</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
BJS	Brown Judaic Studies
BK	<i>Bibel und Kirche</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Altes Testament
BLS	Bible and Literature Series
BN	<i>Biblische Notizen</i>
BZABR	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CE	Common Era
CEB	Common English Bible
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CNT	Commentaire du Nouveau Testament
DCH	<i>Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i> . Edited by David J. A. Clines. 9 vols. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 1993–2014
DCLS	Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Studies
DDD	<i>Dictionary of Demons and Deities in the Bible</i> . Edited by Karel van der Toorn, Bob Becking, and Pieter W. van der Horst. 2nd rev. ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999

<i>De or.</i>	Cicero, <i>De oratore</i>
ECL	Early Christianity and its Literature
EJL	Early Judaism and Its Literature
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>ExpTim</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FCB	Feminist Companion to the Bible
<i>FF</i>	<i>Forschungen und Fortschritte</i>
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
<i>GöMis</i>	<i>Göttinger Miszellen. Beiträge zur ägyptologischen Diskussion</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses (Elenchos)</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 5 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000
HBM	Hebrew Bible Monographs
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HeBAI</i>	<i>Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Historia ecclesiastica</i>
HSM	Harvard Semitic Monographs
HThKAT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
HTS	Harvard Theological Studies
<i>HvTSt</i>	<i>Hervormde theologiese studies</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>Inst.</i>	Quintilian, <i>Institutio oratoria</i>
ISBL	Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JANES</i>	<i>Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JHebS</i>	<i>Journal of Hebrew Scriptures</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
JSNTSup	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament

KEK	Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament (Meyer-Kommentar)
KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament mit der Einheitsübersetzung
LAI	Library of Ancient Israel
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
<i>Leg.</i>	Plato, <i>Leges</i>
LHBOTS	Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LXX	Septuagint
MT	Masoretic Text
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NCBC	New Cambridge Bible Commentary
<i>Neot</i>	<i>Neotestamentica</i>
NET	New English Translation
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIV	New International Version
NIVAC	New International Version Application Commentary
NJB	New Jerusalem Bible
NLT	New Living Translation
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OBT	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTE</i>	<i>Old Testament Essays</i>
OTL	Old Testament Library
PAe	Probleme der Ägyptologie
PHSC	Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and Its Contexts
<i>Probl.</i>	Aristotle, <i>Problemata</i>
<i>RBL</i>	<i>Review of Biblical Literature</i>
RBS	Resources for Biblical Study
<i>RevExp</i>	<i>Review and Expositor</i>
<i>RHPR</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses</i>
<i>RSR</i>	<i>Recherches de science religieuse</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
<i>SEÅ</i>	<i>Svensk exegetisk årsbok</i>
SemeiaSt	Semeia Studies
SFEG	Schriften der Finnischen Exegetischen Gesellschaft

SHBC	Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary
SJ	Studia Judaica
<i>SJOT</i>	<i>Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament</i>
<i>SK</i>	<i>Skrif en kerk</i>
SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
STAT	Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia toimituksia, Sarja B
StOR	Studies in Oriental Religions
SubBi	Subsidia Biblica
SupJSJ	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
THB	Text of the Hebrew Bible
<i>TP</i>	<i>Theologie und Philosophie</i>
<i>Tru</i>	<i>Theologische Rundschau</i>
VTSup	Supplements to Vetus Testamentum
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZBK	Zürcher Bibelkommentare
<i>ZNW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>

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Introduction: Reading Irony in Ancient Texts

Tobias Häner and Virginia Miller

The study of irony and the Bible has a long and comprehensive history. The first major work on this topic in English was Edwin Good's book, *Irony in the Old Testament*, in 1965. Since the publication of Good's work, scholarship in this area has burgeoned, and there have been significant advances in the study of irony in the Bible. In particular, literary-critical analyses of irony have gained in importance for the interpretation of the books of Job¹ and Ecclesiastes,² and also for narrative literature in Genesis,³ Judges,⁴ Jonah,⁵ and the Succession Narrative in 2 Samuel and 1 Kings.⁶ Furthermore, Carolyn Sharp's 2009 book, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, offers an advanced theory of irony that has significantly influenced the study of irony in biblical scholarship.⁷ Indeed, many of the contributors in this volume cite Sharp's definition of irony and engage with her work on irony in the Hebrew Bible. Concerning the New Testament, monographs have been written on irony in the Gospels. Influential earlier works and more recent books include: Karl McDaniel, *Experiencing Irony in the First Gospel: Suspense, Surprise and Curiosity*,⁸ Dorothy Jean Weaver, *The Irony of Power: The Politics of God within Matthew's Narrative*,⁹ Jerry

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- 1 For example, Dirk Geeraerts, "Caught in a Web of Irony: Job and His Embarrassed God," in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen Van Wolde, BibInt 64 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 37–55; Naphtali S. Meshel, *The "Grammar" of Sacrifice: A Generativist Study of the Israelite Sacrificial System in the Priestly System with a "Grammar" of Σ* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
 - 2 For example, Izak Spangenberg, "Irony in the book of Qohelet," *JSOT* 72 (1996): 495–511; Jean-Jacques Lavoie, "Ironie et Ambiguïtés en Qohélet 4, 13–16," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 37/1 (March 2008): 15–39, 13–16.
 - 3 Jonathan A. Kruschwitz, *Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021).
 - 4 Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1988).
 - 5 David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, BJS 301 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995).
 - 6 Virginia Miller, *A King and a Fool? The Succession Narrative as a Satire*, BibInt 179 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
 - 7 Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
 - 8 Karl J. McDaniel, *Experiencing Irony in the First Gospel: Suspense, Surprise and Curiosity*, LNTS 488 (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
 - 9 Dorothy Jean Weaver, *The Irony of Power: The Politics of God within Matthew's Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

Camery-Hoggart, *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and Subtext*,¹⁰ Jerry Ray, *Narrative Irony in Luke-Acts: The Paradoxical Interaction of Prophetic Fulfillment and Jewish Rejection*,¹¹ Paul Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel*,¹² and Arthur Wright, Jr., *The Governor and the King: Irony, Hidden Transcripts, and Negotiating Empire in the Fourth Gospel*.¹³ Book-length treatments of irony in other New Testament texts are uncommon. Worthy of mention is Mark Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context*.¹⁴ Many scholarly examinations of the parables of Jesus make reference to irony, though usually without theorizing its operations in any sustained way. In scholarship written in German, a notable work is Bernd Willmes, *Menschliches Schicksal und ironische Weisheitskritik im Koheletbuch. Kohelets Ironie und die Grenzen der Exegese*.¹⁵

1 Definitions of Irony and Uses of Irony

The term irony has made its journey through intellectual history from ancient rhetoric to romantic philosophy and contemporary literary theory. At the same time, irony has become an important concept in the context of postmodernism (cf. the work of Linda Hutcheon and Richard Rorty).¹⁶ Against the background of this diverse and ever-changing history, definitions and the use of irony have changed over time and in different locations. Importantly, this volume showcases the rich variety of forms and functions in the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and Deuterocanonical books. Moreover, this volume shows the theological gains, in terms of furthering knowledge and creative expression, that are achieved by the use of irony in the examined texts. This highlights the potential of research on irony in biblical scholarship. As the contributions

10 Jerry Camery-Hoggart, *Irony in Mark's Gospel: Text and Subtext* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

11 Jerry L. Ray, *Narrative Irony in Luke-Acts: The Paradoxical Interaction of Prophetic Fulfillment and Jewish Rejection*, SNTSMS 2 (Lewiston, ME: Mellen, 1996).

12 Paul D. Duke, *Irony in the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1985).

13 Arthur M. Wright Jr., *The Governor and the King: Irony, Hidden Transcripts, and Negotiating Empire in the Fourth Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019).

14 Mark D. Nanos, *The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002).

15 Bernd Willmes, *Menschliches Schicksal und ironische Weisheitskritik im Koheletbuch: Kohelets. Ironie und die Grenzen der Exegese*, Biblisch-Theologische Studien 39 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000).

16 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994); Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

to this volume show, irony contributes to the complexity of characters such as Moses or Jeremiah, it intensifies the multilayered nature of narratives such as those in the books of Jonah and Esther, and it adds considerably to the sharpness and subtlety of the theological argumentation in such works as the Wisdom of Solomon and the Pauline letters.

Hence, the present volume takes a multi-perspectival approach aimed at offering a rich and complex picture of irony in the analyzed texts, which showcases the abundance that is inherent in the literary performance of irony. Consequently, the collected contributions do not embrace one single theory of irony, but a variety of theoretical concepts. For example, Mark Brett discusses satirists, poets, and writers such as Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, and Samuel Johnson. Many of the contributors utilize the works of literary theorists such as Wayne Booth, Douglas Muecke, and Uwe Japp. Stephen Lauber, among others, discusses the rhetorician Quintilian and the philosopher Cicero. Juliana Claassens discusses Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical imagination; Stephen L. Cook mentions Kierkegaard's theory of irony and Shakespeare's use of irony. Furthermore, these contributions have incorporated advances in the study of irony and genre. For example, Virginia Miller and Stephen D. Cook argue for the genre of satire, which is heavily dependent on a pervasive and militant form of irony.

A related point, mentioned by Matthew Palwak in his contribution, concerns the prevalence of idiosyncratic and sometimes inconsistent taxonomies of irony and the need for biblical scholars to be specific when they discuss theories of irony. By clearly citing their theorists, the contributors in this volume have avoided the confusion that often arises in generic discussions of irony. Some inconsistencies that are avoided are detailed here. Mark Brett remarks that Samuel Johnson defined satire to be a species of the larger genus called "parody." (The opposite is true for David Marcus.)¹⁷ Mark Awabdy utilizes the theory of Joana Garmendia that considers verbal irony to be spoken irony. However, this definition is different from Muecke's definition of verbal irony, which Miller uses in her contribution. Notably, Muecke considers verbal irony to be the intentional irony of an ironist, as opposed to situational irony, which he considers to be the product of situations that are seen to be ironic but are not necessarily intended to be so.¹⁸ Juliana Claassens uses the theory of Arnold Band. Band argues that irony is concerned with holding two contrary claims simultaneously and cannot accommodate one exclusive claim to the truth, which differs from the Socratic method mentioned by other contributors.

17 Miller, *A King and a Fool?*, 215.

18 Douglas C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (New York: Methuen, 1969), 42.

In addition to canvassing and navigating the many different types of irony, the contributors of this volume offer many original findings regarding the Hebrew Bible, Deuterocanonical books, and the New Testament. These innovations are outlined in the following summary of the chapters, beginning with the first part, which concerns irony in the Pentateuch. The first chapter in this part, written by Mark Brett, explores what Brett describes as “respectful parody” in Genesis 15–16. He argues that these narratives, which are described by some commentators as “anti-exodus” traditions, are rather reframed by parody, as opposed to being subverted and replaced. For example, the respectful parody of the Exodus creed does not completely subvert the creed but rather warns against an exclusionary use of the creed. Brett argues that the reframed narrative makes the point that Israel’s ancestors have themselves oppressed slaves. In this narrative Hagar is in place of Israel, and Israel is in the place of Egypt. Hence, the entire idea of the insider and outsider must be rethought.

There is also irony in the book of Exodus itself. Carolin Neuber focuses in her chapter on Moses’ birth and rescue (Exodus 1–2), the call narrative (3:1–4:17), and two objections of the people against Moses (14:11 and 16:3). Concerning the first narrative, Neuber shows how elements and contrast provoke ironic effects that are aimed at undermining Egypt’s and the pharaoh’s hegemonial claims. In 4:11 instead, Moses argues against his call that he is not sufficiently eloquent—but he does so in a very eloquent way. Finally, in 14:11 and 16:3, Israel’s ironic critique against Moses—and against YHWH’s plans—redounds upon the Israelites themselves.

Mark Awabdy’s chapter considers irony in the book of Leviticus. He cautions that irony is not a prominent feature in Leviticus, as may be expected of a work that is concerned largely with rules and regulations; rather, irony is used sparingly with the purpose of reshaping theology. For example, Awabdy argues that it is ironic that Moses is unable to meet with YHWH in YHWH’s meeting place, given that YHWH’s glory is so great there is no available room left for Moses. Hence, according to Awabdy, this irony demonstrates that the divine presence in the tent required specific and new priestly rituals. Furthermore, Awabdy claims that it is ironic that Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu die when they draw near to YHWH, despite this being the action that they were called to perform as Aaronic priests (16:1). This irony is said to subvert the concept of priestly aristocracy. Awabdy also discusses the irony concerning the anthropomorphism of the personified Land that will keep YHWH’s sabbaths, because Israel was unable to do so.

In the book of Deuteronomy, as in the book of Leviticus, we would not expect to find irony. However, as Benjamin Kilchör points out, there are

several elements in the book that may be considered as irony not in, but of, Deuteronomy. For example, Moses has to prepare Israel for a future he will not share. The people will enter the promised land because of his guidance, but he must die before reaching the goal; the Torah is given through Moses, but in order that it may become valid for Israel in the land, Moses has to die outside of the land.

The second part of this volume concerns irony in the Writings, with an emphasis on the book of Job, the focal text for an international conference on irony and ambiguity in biblical literature, hosted by Tobias Häner in Vienna in July 2020. The irony in YHWH's first speech to Job (Job 38–39) is evident. As Häner's contribution shows, it is helpful to differentiate among different forms of irony, namely antiphrastic irony, the irony of the rhetorical questions, and allusive irony. At the same time, it is important to distinguish between the communicative levels on which these ironies operate: On the intradiegetic level, the irony serves as a means of mitigation that enables Job to accept being put in the wrong. On the extradiegetic level, the irony invites the readers of the book to open up their own perception of God towards the unfathomable.

Raik Heckl's contribution is focused on the prose framework of the book of Job. According to his findings, on the one hand, by means of intertextual connections, the narrative questions the fundamental concepts of the Deuteronomistic historical literature. On the other hand, also Job's brave adherence to God in Job 1:21 and 2:10 is ironically undermined by the heavenly scenes that make him appear as a tragic hero. On the whole, however, the narrative framework underlines the centrality of Job's—and, by consequence, Israel's—relationship to God.

The seventh chapter is written by JiSeong Kwon, who disputes the common argument that the book of Job, in places, parodies particular psalms. Kwon argues that it is impossible to prove the parody of any biblical text, notwithstanding speech in the text that may hint at a parody. Kwon, rather, concludes that these similarities are the result of irony of the general form of psalms. The intention of the irony, according to Kwon, is to highlight themes such as innocent suffering and injustice. This is contrasted with the purpose of parody, which is to be a mockery, in this case a mockery of the Psalms.

Stephen Lauber's argument challenges the claim that there is irony in the Elihu speeches of Job 32–37. Commentators who argue for irony in these speeches generally contend that the author(s) of the speeches uses irony in order to ridicule Elihu and thereby deconstruct the traditional theology of retribution. Yet, Lauber claims that this argument is based on scant evidence and a stronger claim can be made for an interpretation of the first chapter of the

Elihu speeches (Job 32) as more akin to the literary genre of the Hellenistic proem, that does not typically employ irony. By this interpretation Elihu is, instead, credibly defending the traditional theology of retribution. To make his claim, Lauber compares the Elihu speeches to Hellenistic proems that date from approximately the same period as Job and that, Lauber claims, perform the same function as Job. The texts he uses for comparison are the Sirach Prologue, 2 Maccabees 2:19–32, and the *Evagoras* of Isocrates.

Virginia Miller begins her argument with the popular claim that the book of Job is a satire. She then utilizes a single sub-category of Muecke's theory of verbal irony (satirical irony, by his definition) to argue that the prologue of the book of Job is ironic and, therefore, that the true meaning of the prologue is in opposition to the literal presentation of the prologue. She claims that an interpretation of the book of Job as a satire challenges the view that unjust suffering is caused by sin and that all sin must be avenged by a blood-avenger. In a further typological interpretation, utilizing Austin Farrer's theory of types, Miller claims that the image of the blood redeemer in the book of Job is transformed by the Christ event.

Beat Weber's study on irony in the Psalms includes a thorough examination of the vocabulary associated with laughing and mockery, in order to evaluate whether in some cases irony may be involved. In particular, Weber discusses cases of divine laughter, e.g. in Psalms 2:4 and 59:9 as well as passages where the righteous experience ridicule and scorn from their adversaries, such as in Psalms 22:7–9 and 33:21, 25. Finally, he moves to more debatable cases, namely Psalms 64:2–11 and 73:23–24.

Gregory Lee Cuéllar's essay discusses irony in the book of Lamentations through the lens of postcolonial trauma. He argues that the irony in the poetry of Lamentations acted as a means of liberation for people who were suffering from imperial domination. Saliently, the irony is said to be subversive and to present a worldview that is contrary to colonial domination. Therefore, not only does the poetry testify to the strength of the community in terms of surviving imperial violence, but it also shows a community that was determined to resist domination in its narrative story.

In Ecclesiastes, according to Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, irony is used as a form of critique aimed at exposing wrong perceptions of God. It may be seen, therefore, in line with the prophetic critique of idols and idolatry (e.g. Isa 44:9–20). In particular, Schwienhorst-Schönberger highlights an example of irony in the royal travesty, where the joy that is described in Ecclesiastes 2:10 turns out to be fugacious; similarly, in 3:18, human beings are seemingly glorified for being “elected” by God—yet, it turns out that they have no advantage over the beasts.

In chapter 13 Timothy Beal argues that irony is pervasive in the book of Esther, particularly dramatic irony. He claims that the function of this irony is to blur distinctions between us and the other. In other words, he suggests that the irony and ambiguity in the narrative lead us away from binary distinctions. Furthermore, he argues that the irony in the narrative encourages the audience to identify the other within themselves, hence destabilizing the sense of identity of the audience. This idea is further explored in Beal's essay by use of the dynamic of mirroring. Furthermore, Beal discusses the absence of God in the narrative, and the absence of any kind of theological resolution in the story. He argues that this absence encourages us to resolve our own tensions without seeking divine agency.

The third part of the volume includes three contributions on irony in the prophetic literature. Keith Bodner's essay argues that one of the functions of the first chapter of Jeremiah is to serve as an introduction to the irony that unfolds in the rest of the book. It is argued that in the opening chapter the reader is introduced to Jeremiah's connection with Anathoth, which brings forth numerous ironies. For example, Jeremiah is described as descendant of an ill-fated priestly line from a destroyed city—and now, ironically, is called to pass judgment on a city that is on the verge of destruction for similar offenses. Yet, Bodner also interprets Jeremiah to be a familiar figure in the Bible—an unlikely character who is called by God to deliver a message of grace to a broken community.

Stephen L. Cook argues that irony is prevalent in the book of Ezekiel. In his essay, he focuses on the following passages: Ezekiel 24:1–14, the “Song of the Pot”; 8:1–18, a vision of abominations in the temple; 20:18–26, God's “no-good laws”; and 27:1–36, the “Good Ship Tyre.” Cook argues that the purpose of irony in 24:1–14 is to drive the audience to a belief in God's imminent judgment. The second passage, 8:1–18, uncovers unacceptable worship practices. The third text, 20:18–26, presents God as the ironist in order to push the audience to reframe the covenant. In the last passage, 27:1–36, Ezekiel utilizes irony to pass judgment on Tyre.

In chapter 16, Juliana Claassens challenges the traditional interpretation of irony in Jonah, viz., that irony in the book of Jonah is satirical or parodying and is utilized to criticize the prophet. By contrast, Claassens uses Band's definition of irony, i.e. that of holding two contradictory positions simultaneously and without favor, to argue that embracing ambiguity is central to understanding the book of Jonah. For example, she claims that there is a theme in Jonah of “being saved and *not* saved” that well represents a postexilic community. The result of this interpretation is, for Claassens, that the ridicule of Jonah is no

longer the focus of the story and instead, Jonah can be understood as a “perfect prophet” who subverts God’s word.

The next two essays concern irony in Deuterocanonical books. Stephen D. Cook interprets the book of Judith as a satire that is rich in parody, wordplay, ridicule, humor, absurdities, wit, exaggeration, and, most importantly, militant and pervasive irony. Given the work is argued to be a satire, Cook claims there is extensive irony in the book of Judith. Notably, Cook claims that the repetition of the phrase “by the hand of a woman” highlights the central irony of the story: that Holofernes was slain by Judith, a woman. As a satire, Cook argues that the book of Judith serves as both an entertaining drama and subversive resistance literature.

The irony in the book of Wisdom, as Luca Mazzinghi explains, has to be distinguished from sarcasm and parody or satire, for in contrast to these, it is not aimed at excoriating or ridiculing the adversary; it is based on an authentic quest for truth. In this sense, in Wisdom 2:9 the author puts a citation in the mouth of the wicked that undermines their claims; similarly, in Wisdom 13:10–19 the idolaters become the object of the author’s irony; in Wisdom 14:22 instead, according to Mazzinghi one may locate an ironic critique of the *Pax Romana*. Often, these ironies rely on subtle allusions that the reader is expected to recognize. By doing so, one may appreciate the theological insights that the author wants to communicate by means of irony.

Finally, two contributions uncover irony in parts of the New Testament. In chapter 19, John Painter challenges P. J. Williams’ claim that John 1:1–18 is not the original Prologue of the fourth Gospel. Painter argues that the content of the Prologue is required to make sense of the rest of the Gospel. Painter makes this claim by demonstrating literary dependence that is partly reliant on irony. For example, he argues that the verbal irony that is found in the repeated use of ὑψωθήναι, 3:14 (×2); 8:28; 12:32, 34—which suggests Jesus was both condemned to die and exalted—foreshadows, and is therefore dependent on, the Prologue. Moreover, Painter argues that the pervasive dramatic irony conveyed by the omniscient narrator is also dependent on the Prologue.

Matthew Pawlak discusses the ongoing debate regarding irony in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Notably, he argues that the debate would be strengthened by a more specific discussion of irony. He rightly argues there are different typologies and functions of irony, that are often confused or conflated in biblical scholarship. Whether or not these chapters are ironic, and what kind of irony can be detected in these passages, are important in terms of characterizing Paul and better understanding his aims. Pawlak detects different types of irony in the chapters, including sarcasm, *asteismos* (a self-deprecating form of irony), and situational irony.

2 The Importance of Being Ironic

In closing this introduction, we may ask whether there is a main purpose lying at the foundation of the different types and uses of irony explored in this volume. To our view, the fundamental aim of irony is twofold: it is, as the title of our volume suggests, both subversive and innovative. On the one hand, going back to the primordial stage of the ironic discourse in the Socratic dialogues, irony in its *pars destruens* is used to expose premature answers, to challenge conventional truth claims, to unmask hidden contradictions.¹⁹ In this perspective, the aim of the rhetoric of irony is the knowledge of not-knowledge, the “truth of negation,”²⁰ or—as Uwe Japp coins it—the knowledge that is shaped as a question about knowledge.²¹ In theological terms, irony in this sense is motivated by an anti-idolatrous or, more broadly, an anti-ideological intention: it works to deconstruct “false truths” and “true fakeries,”²² and, as Carolyn Sharp observes, it also invites us readers to move beyond “the limits of our own hermeneutical myopia” and “to turn away from our misunderstandings and our idolatries of the written.”²³ On the other hand, in its *pars construens*, irony paves the way for a new theological creativity, encouraging to explore the untold and unthought. For this reason, irony is always popular in times of change. Indeed, as Richard Rorty argues, the evolution of society comes about by working through conflicting discourse and not out of thin air.²⁴ Similarly, Booth speaks of irony as a reconstruction. He sees irony as pulling down an old dwelling place while it builds another one, overlooking the old site.²⁵ This process of rebuilding is always constructive, as the higher purpose of irony is conceived of as just. According to Edwin Good, this higher purpose may be described as a “liberating faith” that is freed from the bondage of ideological distortions or fanaticism.²⁶ More broadly, we may state that properly conducted ironic dialogue opens up a liminal space beyond the tensions of conflicting streams of thought in a way that is constructive for human beings and for society—a particularly relevant undertaking historically and in the present context. As the

19 On the *pars destruens* and the *pars construens* of irony, see Sergio Gaburro, *L'ironia, "voce di sottile silenzio": Per un'ermeneutica del linguaggio rivelativo*, Universo teologia 101 (Cinisello Balsamo [Milano]: San Paolo, 2013), 210–213.

20 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 249.

21 “Das Wissen der Ironie ist (...) in erster Linie als die Frage nach dem Wissen zu verstehen”: Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 3rd ed., RoteReihe 137 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2021), 326.

22 Gaburro, *L'ironia*, 212.

23 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 249.

24 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xv.

25 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 33–39.

26 Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*. (London: SPCK, 1965), 244.

contributions in this volume demonstrate, the study of irony in the biblical texts is bound to enable new insights and to indicate new directions, since the ironies of Scripture “call us to reform and renew our imaginative views of what is possible.”²⁷

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27 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 250.

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PART 1

Irony in the Pentateuch



Respectful Parody of Exodus Traditions in Genesis 15–16

Mark G. Brett

It might seem overly paradoxical to suggest that some forms of parody can be respectful. A modern sensibility tends to find no interesting difference between parody and satire. Classical accounts, however, do indeed reveal some important distinctions, especially when the literary precursor at issue is not itself the target, but rather, the instrument of parody.¹ The argument of this essay suggests that the notion of respectful parody turns out to be illuminating when it comes to the interpretation of Genesis 15–16.² The peculiar details of these chapters have provoked some commentators to describe them as “anti-exodus” traditions, but this characterization seems too simplistic if it implies a binary contrast between interpretive attitudes—either for or against the exodus, as if the exodus itself were the target.³ There is abundant evidence in Genesis 15–16 that the exodus story is emulated and revised, but not in a manner that would see it replaced or superseded. What we find in these chapters are narrative reframings. Our discussion will first assemble the most relevant details in the texts, and then reflect on respectful parody as an interpretive lens.

- 1 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (New York: Methuen, 1985), 32, 58–62; Will Kynes, “Beat Your Parodies into Swords and Your Parodied Books into Spears: A New Paradigm for Parody in the Hebrew Bible,” *BibInt* 19 (2011): 276–310.
- 2 I am not suggesting that Gen 15 and 16 belong to an emic genre called “respectful parody,” which would have been recognized by Persian period or Hellenistic audiences. Nevertheless, I will endeavor to show that respectful parody does belong to the communicative pragmatics of mimesis in these chapters, and in ways that some of these audiences would indeed have appreciated. For a general overview of literary mimesis in the Hebrew Bible, see especially Gary N. Knoppers, *Prophets, Priests, and Promises: Essays on the Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah*, SVT 186 (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 83–119, although his discussion unfortunately overlooks the possibility of respectful parody as one variation of mimesis.
- 3 E.g., Jan C. Gertz, “Abraham, Mose und der Exodus: Beobachtungen zur Redaktionsgeschichte von Gen 15,” in *Abschied vom Jahwisten: Die Komposition des Hexateuch in der jüngsten Diskussion*, ed. Jan C. Gertz, Konrad Schmid, and Markus Witte, BZAW 315 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002), 63–81, distinguishes between an initially critical attitude to the exodus in Gen 15:4–10, 17–18 and later additions in 15:11, 13–16 that plainly foreshadow the exodus. The later layer is said to provide an orthodox “bridge” between the Genesis and Exodus narratives, correcting the portions more critical of the exodus traditions.

I will assume that the reinterpretations in Genesis 15–16 were introduced late in the formation of the book of Genesis, adjusting earlier materials. This is now a common view of Genesis 15, but not so much of chapter 16. A classic source analysis uncovers an older Yahwist or “J” story of Hagar,⁴ but if there ever was an older layer, I will suggest that it has been effectively integrated into a new narrative flow that moves from Genesis 15 to 16, while being mindful of the content of chapter 17, a key Priestly text. Among the many hypotheses concerning the history of composition, I will presume that there is evidence of a debate between Priestly and post-Priestly editors, and that a supposedly earlier “J” text has been lost in the mists of time.⁵ So it is not just that Genesis 15 was composed after the Priestly narrative, as is now commonly supposed, but I also want to read Genesis 16 as “post-Priestly,” while remaining agnostic as to the earliest form of the Hagar narrative in this chapter. By implication, my reading will offer no compositional history that can identify each layer, specified with surgical precision. Nevertheless, a number of basic points about the history of these chapters can be readily established.

The editors of Genesis 15–16 clearly presume the Priestly idea that Abram’s name is changed to Abraham only in Genesis 17. Many commentators elide the distinction between Abram in Genesis 11–16 and Abraham thereafter, but the final editors of Genesis certainly have not. At the same time, these same editors have contested the Priestly conviction (asserted in Exod 6:2–3) that the ancestors never heard the divine name YHWH. On the contrary, Genesis 15 asserts that the name of YHWH was known in ancestral times, and accordingly, these late editors would have found no difficulty in recovering any older story in Genesis 16 that mentions YHWH explicitly, whether or not we can reconstruct the details of such an older story. In sum, I will argue that the Hagar narrative finds itself fittingly located between Genesis 15 and 17.

4 Source analyses have commonly distinguished between J and P elements in Gen 16, as noted for example in Sarah Shectman, *Women in the Pentateuch: A Feminist and Source-Critical Analysis* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009), 60–61, 83–84.

5 For a more detailed argument, along with discussion of earlier literature, see Mark G. Brett, “YHWH among the Nations: The Politics of Divine Names in Genesis 15 and 24,” in *The Politics of the Ancestors: Exegetical and Historical Perspectives on Genesis 12–36*, ed. Mark G. Brett and Jakob Wöhrle, FAT 124 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 113–130.

1 Reframing the Exodus in Genesis 15

Genesis 15:7 contains a well-known formula for divine self-revelation: “I am YHWH.”⁶ The wording would have evoked a number of texts like Exodus 20:2 and Leviticus 25:38, which tie the revelation of the divine name to the exodus. Whatever modern historians might conclude about the advent of Yahwism, the Priestly view is clear: Abram never received a revelation of YHWH’s name. Genesis 15, on the other hand, creates a flatly contradictory scenario: while the ancestor’s name was still Abram, he heard directly from YHWH: “I am YHWH, who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” The scope of the YHWH story is expanded backwards in time, from the sojourn in Egypt to an origin in Babylon. It is not simply that the narrator and audience know the divine name, while it remains unknown to the characters in Genesis, as suggested by P in Exodus 6:2–3. The secret of the name is out, and Abram can use it freely (Gen 15:2, 8).

The scope of the Yahwism in Genesis 15 has also been expanded in geographical terms. Instead of El Shaddai’s limited promise of “all the land of Canaan” (P’s vision in Gen 17:8), YHWH’s promised land stretches “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen 15:18). This imagined territory is empire-wide, and any exodus departures from Egypt and Babylon are, by implication, episodes on the way to a much grander vision of Yahwistic landholdings. In the world to come, the people of YHWH will experience return migrations in both directions—back to the Nile and back to the Euphrates—and apparently, YHWH will nevertheless be with them wherever they go.⁷

The audience will have been well aware of an older and narrower picture of Israelite territory: the lands previously occupied by Hittites, Perizzites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites, and Jebusites, as mentioned in Genesis 15:19–21. Similar lists are to be found in Exodus and Deuteronomy, with minor variations, but none of these lists includes Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites, the three groups that are mentioned first. Genesis 15 is conspicuously different in this respect, and the additional three kinship groups have inevitably attracted much scholarly discussion.

6 This formula is shared by the MT and SP in 15:7 but missing from the LXX. It seems that the LXX translators did not embrace the theological models of divine naming that are still evident in the Hebrew text. For a detailed consideration of all the possible intertexts, see Moshe Anbar, “Genesis 15: A Conflation of Two Deuteronomistic Narratives,” *JBL* 101 (1982): 39–55.

7 A likely historical context for this grand territorial vision, as discussed below, would be the Persian satrapy “Beyond the River,” when Judeans were living from Elephantine in the Nile to the town of *Al Jahūdu* in Babylon.

Rather than being marked for extinction, these three groups evidently represent potential allies within the vast land mass that stretches between the Nile and the Euphrates.⁸ By implication, the promised land will not be an exclusive possession. Indeed, in the previous chapter of Genesis, even Amorites are represented as potential allies. The wording in Genesis 14:13 could hardly be construed otherwise: Abram lived “by the oaks of Mamre the Amorite, the brother of Eschol and of Aner; these were the בעלי ברית of Abram.” The Hebrew wording here would be best translated “treaty partners.”⁹ The question whether Hivites might also become treaty partners will later be treated in Genesis 34, but a closer discussion of that chapter would take us too far from our present purposes.¹⁰

Just a few intertextual comparisons with the three social groups mentioned in Genesis 15:19 will be sufficient to indicate the potential for alliances and kinship connections. Moses married a Kenite, it is suggested in Judges 1:16 and 4:11. Caleb was a Kenizzite, according to Joshua 14:6 and 14, who was absorbed into Israel with distinction. The mysterious Kadmonites, on the other hand, are not mentioned outside of Genesis 15, but we might think of the children of Keturah in the ארץ קדם (“land of Kedem” in Gen 25:6), who sprang from Abraham’s loins. Alternatively, Kadmonite might refer to the Aramean kin of Abram, as implied by Genesis 29:1, where Jacob’s journey takes him to בני־קדם (“people of the east”).¹¹ Either way, the wording points to Abrahamic kinship groups. So the first three peoples—Kenites, Kenizzites, and Kadmonites—point to relatives or to allies. The reframing implies, as already suggested, that the promised land should not be thought of as an exclusive possession.

A territory that stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates would, however, raise an interesting question about the western boundary: would parts of Egypt need to be included within the promised land? An affirmative answer seems inevitable, and perhaps this prospect then established the relevance of a story about an Egyptian slave literally named “the stranger”: Hagar. The narrative of Genesis 16 is replete with intertextual connections with the exodus story,

8 Thomas Römer, “Abraham and ‘The Law’ and ‘The Prophets,’” in *The Reception and Remembrance of Abraham*, ed. Pernille Carstens and Niels P. Lemche, Perspectives on Hebrew Scriptures and its Contexts 13 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011), 87–101, here 100–101.

9 Theodore J. Lewis, “The Identity and Function of El/Baal Berith,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 401–423, here 413–414.

10 See Mark G. Brett, “The Priestly Dissemination of Abraham,” *HeBAI* 3/1 (2014): 87–107, here 99–106.

11 Joel S. Burnett, “Prophecy in Transjordan: Balaam Son of Beor,” in *Enemies and Friends of the State: Ancient Prophecy in Context*, ed. Christopher A. Rollston. (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2018), 135–204, especially 168–176, compares Gen 29:1 with Num 22:5 and argues that the location presumed in both texts is the Euphrates “border.”

as many commentators have observed.¹² Sarah's oppression of Hagar (ענה in 16:6), for example, matches the word choice for describing Pharaoh's oppression in Gen 15:13 (cf. Exod 1:11–12), and the flight of Hagar (ברה in 16:6) matches the flight of Israel in Exodus 14:5. But can we construe this kind of intertextuality as a “polemic” against the exodus?¹³ Before answering this question, we will first discuss some of the salient details of the text before returning to discuss the conceptual framework of parody.

2 Inverting the Exodus in Genesis 16

Once again, beginning with the Priestly narrative in Genesis 17 is instructive for understanding even Genesis 16: Ishmael is blessed with fertility (adopting the key Priestly verb רבה in 16:10) and to become a “great nation” (גוי גדול) in Genesis 17:20. This is a significant phrase in Israel's national tradition, גוי גדול (e.g., Gen 46:3, Deut 26:5, and perhaps Gen 12:2), but in the context of ch. 17, Ishmael belongs within the “many nations” descended from Abraham. The Priestly writer moves on in 17:21 to suggest, nevertheless, that the covenant was to be established with Isaac rather than Ishmael. When Ishmael is later circumcised, he provides the paradigm for Abraham's descendants who can be “integrated into the covenant from outside,” as Jakob Wöhrle puts it.¹⁴ By the end of Genesis 17, Ishmael can take his position within the covenant community, even if his identity remains in some respects betwixt and between. The reader is thereby made aware, by implication, that the children of Egyptian slaves might well become members of the Yahwistic covenant. How would this “ecumenical” scenario have been received by audiences who were taught, repeatedly, that Egyptians were historically the oppressors of Israel? Genesis 16 seems to address exactly this kind of question.

The narrative begins by making the point that Israel's ancestors are themselves capable of oppressing slaves (16:6). In this inverted narrative, Hagar stands for Israel, and Israel stands for Egypt. Thomas Römer draws out the implication that “The resulting irony should preclude any triumphant and

12 E.g., David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 23–38; Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narrative* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 13–14.

13 So Thomas Römer, “Exodus in the Book of Genesis,” *SEÅ* 75 (2010): 1–20.

14 Jakob Wöhrle, “Abraham amidst the Nations: The Priestly Concept of Covenant and the Persian Imperial Ideology,” in *Covenant in the Persian Period*, ed. Richard J. Baultch and Gary N. Knoppers (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 23–39, here 80.

exclusionist use of the Exodus creed.”¹⁵ He takes this claim to be polemical, but I would make the same point in slightly less dramatic terms: the narrative inversions in Genesis 16 suggest not so much that the exodus creed is inherently exclusionary, but rather, that it might be put to exclusionary uses.

The implications of this qualification will be spelled out below, but here we may note in passing that essentially the same point is to be found in at least two other places: first, in the prophetic corpus, Amos 9:7 asserts that there was more than one exodus, so accordingly, Israel is not unique in this particular respect. The exodus narrative could configure the history of other nations as well.

Secondly, in the law of Deuteronomy 23:8 it is permissible to include Egyptians within the Yahwistic assembly (קהל) from the “third generation.” The explanation for this counter-intuitive provision in Deuteronomy is that the Israelites themselves lived as strangers in Egypt. One might have assumed that living alongside an oppressive dominant culture would more likely lead to the opposite conclusion—that Egyptians should *not* be allowed into the assembly. But the law apparently places more weight simply on the social proximity, rather than on an intergenerational pattern of domination. In a similarly paradoxical way, the enslaved person named “the stranger” in Genesis 16 is presented as an Egyptian, while her oppressors are Israelite ancestors, deliberately inverting the conventional identities of the exodus narrative.

Later in Genesis—in Genesis 24:62 and 25:11—we are told that Isaac resides in the very same place that was named by Hagar “Beer-lahai-roi” (16:14). In other words, Isaac and Ishmael’s families are to live side by side, in intersecting territories. The Priestly claim that Isaac’s descendants were to live in “the land of Canaan” (17:8) is problematized by envisaging cohabitation in the desert country between Canaan and Egypt. The promised land is thereby expanded towards the Nile, but it is expanded as shared country.

The hybridity of this space is highlighted in Genesis 16 when the Egyptian slave is free to provide her own name for God, and to name the site at which she was seen by this deity. She has been seen and heard by El (16:11, 13), and that divine name is securely founded in the story. But the narrator also makes clear to the audience of Genesis 16, that the El who sees and speaks to Hagar is none other than YHWH (16:7, 9, 10, 13). What is less clear, however, is whether Hagar herself heard this divine name. The names “Ishmael” and “El Roi” presume only that she knew the name of El, a scenario which fits neatly with the Priestly conviction concerning the non-revelation of YHWH in Genesis. But 16:11 contains one notable clause in direct speech, “YHWH has listened to

15 Römer, “Exodus in the Book of Genesis,” 15.

your suffering,” even though Hagar shows no sign of responding to that name. At this point, Hagar hears the divine name in a manner that is consistent with its revelation in 15:7. An Egyptian woman has been seen and heard by YHWH, in the land between the Nile and Canaan. Hagar and Ishmael thereby occupy a liminal space, as Safwat Marzouk has suggested, that deconstructs “the binary oppositions of insider and outsider.”¹⁶

3 On Respectful Parody

In order to understand Genesis 15–16 in terms of respectful parody, some conceptual histories—both modern and ancient—will need to be unpacked. In the eighteenth century, the arts of ridicule culminated in the literary exemplars of Alexander Pope and Jonathan Swift, and their influence was so great that any works of parody that followed in their wake were often inspired by similarly subversive and satirical purposes. Also in the eighteenth century, the classic dictionary compiled by Samuel Johnson reflects a longer literary history, and his definition of parody was more expansive: “a kind of writing, in which the words of an author or his thoughts are taken, and by a slight change adapted to some new purpose.”¹⁷ Dr. Johnson took satire to be simply one version of a larger umbrella category, a species of the larger genus called “parody.” Following his line of thought, one might conclude that parody encompasses a broad “spectrum of possible intertextual relations.”¹⁸

The strength of Dr. Johnson’s definition, however, is also a potential weakness, because we would still need to clarify the scope of parody within the almost limitless possibilities for intertextual relationships. Julia Kristeva’s sweeping claim comes to mind: “any text is the absorption and transformation of another.”¹⁹ Regardless of whether a text is entirely traditional, or breathtakingly innovative, it is in an important sense unreadable without some understanding of the horizons of expectations that lend it meaning. When reading ancient texts, of course, the interpretive task is made considerably more difficult, since so

16 Safwat Marzouk, “Interrogating Identity: A Christian Egyptian Reading of the Hagar-Ishmael Traditions,” in *Colonialism and the Bible: Contemporary Reflections from the Global South*, ed. Tat-siong Benny Liew (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018), 3–30, here 14; cf. Nyasha Junior, *Reimagining Hagar: Blackness and Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

17 Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language*, vol. 2, 6th ed. (London: 1785), 280.

18 Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000), 37.

19 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 66.

much background is often simply assumed and unstated—history, language, culture, genre, economy, politics, and so on. Especially when any proposed literary models stem from outside the biblical traditions, scholars often need to construct a set of criteria that may lend weight to their comparisons.

Thus, for example, Serge Frolov and Allen Wright adopt six basic criteria in their study of 1 Samuel 17, when seeking to determine whether the more likely predecessors for the David and Goliath story come from Homer's *Iliad*, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, or from the *Story of Sinuhe*.²⁰ The six criteria they adopt might be paraphrased as a series of questions about the possible relationships between a literary precursor and its appropriation: (1) how accessible would the proposed precursor have been, (2) how common the analogies drawn from it, (3) how dense the number of allusions, (4) whether there is a discernable order in the proposed parallels, (5) whether any distinctive elements emerge with particular significance, and (6) the interpretability of the comparison—"the capacity of the proposed hypertext [precursor] to make sense of the hypertext."²¹ In the case of Genesis 15–16, it is beyond dispute that these chapters allude to well-known exodus traditions, so there will be no need to consider our texts through this or any other grid that might seek simply to establish the exodus tradition as a precursor. So we may advance to the question whether "respectful parody" can be seen as an appropriate interpretive lens.

Parenthetically, it is worth noting that there is clear evidence of another kind of parody in earlier exodus traditions, and a contrast may be illuminating at this point. Exactly which versions of a Mosaic exodus story are presumed by the editors of Genesis 15–16 might be debatable, but it is likely that an older Sargon legend entered Israel's tradition well before the Persian period.²² According to the Assyrian literary predecessor, the infant Sargon was set adrift in the Euphrates in a basket caulked with bitumen, but he was retrieved from the river and adopted into a royal home. The analogies with the Moses story are manifest. It is also possible to see some resonances between this Sargon/Moses drama and particular themes from the legends of King Cyrus,

20 Serge Frolov and Allen Wright, "Homeric and Ancient Near Eastern Intertextuality in 1 Samuel 17," *JBL* 130 (2011): 451–471.

21 These six criteria were adapted from Denis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 8–9. Cf. Gil Rosenberg, "כַּעַת חִיָּה: An Allusion Connecting Genesis 18:10, 14 and 2 Kings 4:16–17," *JBL* 139 (2020): 701–720, who proposes fifteen criteria for intertextual comparisons.

22 Chaim Cohen, "The Legend of Sargon and the Birth of Moses," *JANES* 4 (1972): 46–51; Athalya Brenner, "Female Social Behaviour: Two Descriptive Patterns within the 'Birth of the Hero' Paradigm," *VT* 36 (1986): 257–73; Eckart Otto, "Political Theology in Judah and Assyria: The Beginning of the Hebrew Bible as Literature," *SEÅ* 65 (2000): 59–76.

and such resonances might well have impressed an audience in the Persian period, regardless of how old the original riverine exposure narrative might have been.²³ Several generations of readers could well have understood such examples of mimicry in terms of parody (whether mimicry of the Sargon or of the Cyrus traditions), but hardly as *respectful* parody. On the contrary, this kind of mimicry seems designed to assert a “counter-history” or counter-narrative over against the elite model, deflating the foreign imperial king and elevating Moses in his place.²⁴ It does not seem likely that the narratives in Genesis 15–16 were designed to be polemical in this way.

In general terms, we may say that parody is constituted by its relationship with a well-known precursor and enlivened by some kind of polemical intent, but the focus of the polemic need not be the earlier text itself. It may instead, for example, be directed towards the world of the author.²⁵ Northrop Frye provides the example of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which engages a classical model supplied by the *Odyssey* without being concerned to undermine it. Instead, it is the world of James Joyce that is the satirical target of *Ulysses*, not the world of Homer.²⁶ With this conceptual contrast in mind, it is perhaps easier to appreciate that the Greek and Roman classical repertoires provide numerous similar examples, in which the literary model is not itself a target, but rather, an instrument.²⁷ This is broadly what I am suggesting for our understanding of Genesis 15–16, that it is the world of the authors (or editors) that is primarily at issue, rather than the exodus traditions themselves.

In the case of Genesis 15–16, however, to speak of “the world of the authors” requires a number of qualifications. The very concept of an author is controversial in biblical studies, not to mention the prospect of grasping literary intentions. Particularly relevant for our purposes are Hindy Najman’s attempts to expose the anachronistic assumptions of authorship that commonly

23 H. Zlotnick-Sivan, “Moses the Persian? Exodus 2, the ‘Other’ and Biblical ‘Mnemohistory,’” *ZAW* 116 (2004): 189–205.

24 The idea of counter-history was developed by Michel Foucault, *Society Must be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey (New York: Picador, 2003). Cf. Amos Funkenstein, “History, Counter-History and Memory,” in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution,”* ed. Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 66–81.

25 Dentith, *Parody*, 17.

26 Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957), 313.

27 For a number of examples, along with secondary literature, see Kynes, “New Paradigm for Parody.”

underpin documentarian and redactional studies of the Bible.²⁸ At issue are not just the Romantic models of authorship of the nineteenth century, but also the Hellenistic grammarians of Alexandria, who forged their own notions of Homer's authorial personality in the second and third century BCE.²⁹ In recent studies, Najman has been inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche's inaugural lecture at the University of Basel (1869) to discover an earlier and different kind of Homeric discourse in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE, which embraced a disparate range of compositions—all attributed to Homer, as the source and "founder" of cultural authority. In that earlier context, rather than generating any deep concerns about authenticity, attributing new works to "Homer" was taken to be a mark of respect. Much the same dynamic, Najman argues, shaped the creation of "Mosaic discourse," during the fifth and fourth centuries, in the making of the Pentateuch.³⁰ The cultural logics in ancient Greece and Israel were, in this respect at least, comparable.

Najman's work potentially adds another dimension to my hypothesis concerning respectful parody. Not only is the identification of an authorial personality behind Genesis 15–16 largely irrelevant to my hypothesis, but the earlier notions of "Mosaic discourse" also provoke interesting questions. Instead of flowing towards a Mosaic discourse—in this case a Mosaic discourse concerning the exodus—these chapters in Genesis divert the reader's attention to another "founder": the ancestor formerly known as Abram. There are at least two founding fathers at issue, Abram and Moses.³¹ I have suggested that the exodus precursor traditions are not being displaced or superseded in Genesis 15–16, but complexified via respectful parody. The "Mosaic" hypotexts are not so much the target as the *instrument* for making some new points. What, then, are the issues in the world of the late Persian period that might have generated this peculiar kind of mimetic circulation?

28 E.g., Hindy Najman, *Seconding Sinai: The Development of Mosaic Discourse in Second Temple Judaism*, SupJSJ 77 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–40, invoking Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology: Essential Works of Foucault 1954–1984*, vol. 2, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Josué V. Harari (New York: The New Press, 1998), 205–222, but without embracing Foucault's analysis of power.

29 See especially Najman, "Traditionary Processes and Textual Unity in 4 Ezra," in *Fourth Ezra and Second Baruch: Reconstruction After the Fall*, ed. Matthias Henze and Gabriele Boccaccini (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 99–117, discussing Friedrich Nietzsche, "Homer and Classical Philology," in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, vol. 3., ed. Oscar Levy, trans. John McFarland Kennedy (Edinburgh: T. N. Foulis, 1910), 145–170.

30 Najman, *Seconding Sinai*, 1–40.

31 A further irony arises if Hagar is to be seen also as a Moses figure, as argued for example by Thomas B. Dozeman, "The Wilderness and Salvation History in the Hagar Story," *JBL* 117 (1998): 23–43, here 29–32; Römer, "Exodus in the Book of Genesis," 15–16.

4 Genesis 15–16 in the Persian Period

I have suggested that some level of disagreement with the Priestly tradition is evident in these texts. YHWH's expansive claim to land in Genesis 15 overlays, in effect, the entire Persian imperial territory, and an exaggerated contrast with P's modest vision of Israel's holdings in Genesis 17:8 seems inevitable. The Priestly allocation of "all the land of Canaan" was apparently no longer sufficient to satisfy the Yahwistic communities who lived in the territory that stretches from the Nile right across to the Euphrates (Gen 15:18). At least from the point of view of the Persian-period editors, all this land belonged ultimately to YHWH, even if it was shared country in practice. All the descendants of Abraham and Sarah lived in this land, and they were potential allies. If earlier interpreters of the exodus story had not seen this level of complexity, then their social vision needed to be revised and expanded. Is it possible, then, to identify a particular group in the world of the Persian period who are the target of such a respectful parody?

The target seems not to be the Priestly school itself. This is a modification of the Priestly theology, not a rejection of it. A mimicry of empire is found already in the Priestly idea that Abraham and Sarah would become the father and mother of many nations.³² Either the Priestly author, or perhaps a Holiness editor,³³ had affirmed in Genesis 17 the right of children descended from Egyptian intermarriages to join the covenant community. The law in Deuteronomy 23:8 was most likely known to the Persian-period editors, so by implication, Genesis 17 opened the possibility of cultic inclusion to the first generation of intermarriages with Egyptian women, rather than waiting to the third generation as the Deuteronomic law required. But if Genesis 17 had implicitly expressed an offer of inclusion to Egyptians, why would it have been necessary in Genesis 16 to envisage the possibility of a shared space with Ishmaelites between Egypt and Yehud—or to recover an older story that arrived at roughly the same conclusion—while highlighting that the name of YHWH had been revealed also to Hagar?

The most likely target seems to be a group associated with the leadership of Ezra, even if the social history of this group remains unclear.³⁴ Ezra 9 asserts the view that no marriage with foreign women can be legitimate, including

³² Wöhrle, "Priestly Concept of Covenant."

³³ Brett, "Priestly Dissemination of Abraham."

³⁴ It is possible to distinguish, for example, between earlier material in Ezra 7–11 and later perspectives in Ezra 1–6 from Hellenistic times. Some scholars reconstruct up to a dozen separate layers. See, e.g., Raik Heckl, "The Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah as a Testimony for the Competition Between the Temples in Jerusalem and on Mt. Gerizim in

any marriage with Egyptians (9:1). Generally acknowledged among scholars of Ezra-Nehemiah is the fact that the Pentateuch contains no such regulation. Even Deuteronomy 7:3, which is sometimes adduced as a potentially relevant law, does not propose a universal prohibition, and the marriage restriction in Leviticus 21:14, on the other hand, is binding only on the high priest. So when the proposal to dissolve intermarriages in Ezra 10:3–4 is said to be “in accordance with the torah,” in what possible sense could this be a reference to the Torah of Moses?

In Hindy Najman’s view, this is not simply a case of “inner-biblical interpretation” or early *midrash halakhah*, but rather, a respectful pseudonymous attribution to Moses—a parade example of the “Mosaic discourse” of the time.³⁵ Any distinction between reading and interpreting was yet to come, and it was still possible to craft an authoritative Torah of Moses without a clear Pentateuchal warrant. This may be so, but the insight does not relieve us of the need to reflect on the social history of Ezra’s community. Certainly, “the specific conception of Scripture in Ezra-Nehemiah must be understood in light of the need to authorize the restoration of the Second Temple community,”³⁶ but specifically which community is being authorized by Ezra-Nehemiah?

We do not need any elaborate theory explaining the composition of the book of Ezra in order to see that it has no space for Samaritans; Judah and Jerusalem are seen to have an exclusive grasp on the name of YHWH and Mosaic discourse. How far north would “all the land of Canaan” extend exactly? The Ezra party’s focus on Jerusalem would have, necessarily, detracted from any claims to legitimacy asserted by the Gerizim temple. But this exclusively Judean focus is not what the Pentateuch itself requires.³⁷ On the contrary, the Pentateuch—including the main streams of both Priestly and Deuteronomic conversation—scrupulously resists a focus on Jerusalem that would exclude

the Early Years of the Seleucid Rule over Judah,” in *The Bible, Qumran and the Samaritans*, ed. Magnar Kartveit and Gary N. Knoppers, SJ 104 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 115–132.

35 Hindy Najman, *Past Renewals: Interpretative Authority, Renewed Revelation and the Quest for Perfection in Jewish Antiquity*, SJSJ 53 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 81–82.

36 Najman, *Past Renewals*, 86.

37 Heckl, “Composition of Ezra-Nehemiah,” 130–132; Thomas Römer, “Cult Centralization and the Publication of the Torah Between Jerusalem and Samaria,” in *The Bible, Qumran and the Samaritans*, ed. Magnar Kartveit and Gary N. Knoppers, SJ 104/Studia Samaritana 10 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 79–92; more broadly, see Benedikt Hensel, *Juda und Samaria: Zum Verhältnis zweier Jahwismen in nach-exilischer Zeit*, FAT 110 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

Gerizim.³⁸ Indeed, the “Hexateuchal” perspectives that are retained within the Pentateuch—including Genesis 15—are unambiguously defensive of Gerizim³⁹ in ways that are diametrically opposed to Ezra’s rendering of the Torah of Moses.

In sum, I have not argued that Genesis 15–16 belong to an emic genre called “respectful parody,” which would have been recognized by Persian-period or Hellenistic audiences. I am suggesting that these audiences would have recognized the exaggerated imitations and reversals of exodus traditions. Instead of YHWH’s name being revealed first to Moses, it was revealed first to Abram and secondly to his enslaved Egyptian wife. Instead of exclusive control of YHWH’s name in Judah and Jerusalem, the name would be used from the Nile to the Euphrates. Hagar’s son has already entered the covenant community via circumcision, so the inclusion of such intermarriages seems entirely possible. No exodus tradition is subverted or superseded by these outlandish claims, but the exodus readings of the Ezra party are thrown into relief. The exaggerated vision of promised territory in Genesis 15, along with the inversion of the exodus story in Genesis 16, could well have been understood in terms of respectful parody *avant la lettre*.

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- 38 The H material does contain evidence of a “centralizing” imperative, but like Deuteronomy, H studiously avoids giving priority either to Jerusalem or to Gerizim. See especially Julia Rhyder, *Centralizing the Cult: The Holiness Legislation in Leviticus 17–26*, FAT 134 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019); Mark G. Brett, “The Imperial Context of the Pentateuch,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Pentateuch*, ed. Joel S. Baden and Jeffrey Stackert (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 443–462.
- 39 Brett, “YHWH among the Nations,” argues that the whole of Gen 15 sits within the Hexateuchal horizon, whereas Rainer Albertz, “The Formative Impact of the Hexateuchal Redaction: An Interim Result,” in *The Post-Priestly Pentateuch: New Perspectives on Its Redactional Development and Theological Profiles*, ed. Federico Giuntoli and Konrad Schmid, FAT 101 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 53–74, identifies only 15:13–17a as Hexateuchal redaction.

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Widerstand, Sympathie und Entlarvung: Ironie im Exodusbuch

Carolin Neuber

Dass das Exodusbuch Texte enthält, die als ironisch wahrgenommen werden und wohl auch so intendiert sind, ist bereits bemerkt worden.¹ Doch welche Merkmale deuten auf ein ironisches Verständnis hin? Welche Formen der Ironie enthält das Buch? Sind sie beabsichtigt oder werden sie erst in moderner Rezeption ironisch aufgefasst? Was leisten sie für den Lesevorgang? Zur Beantwortung dieser Fragen werden drei Beispiele aus dem Exodusbuch analysiert (2.), die die Bandbreite der im Buch erkennbaren Ironie veranschaulichen. Zuvor sind einige Grundlagen von Ironie zu bedenken (1.).

1 Formen, Signale und Ziele von Ironie

Ironie in ihren verschiedenen Kontexten und Gestalten wird in sprach- und literaturwissenschaftlichen Untersuchungen sehr unterschiedlich methodisch analysiert, erklärt und definiert.² Allen Ansätzen dürfte zugrunde liegen, dass

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- 1 Vgl. z.B. William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 153f.; 210; Benno Jacob, *Das Buch Exodus* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1997), 7–19; 79f.; Beat Weber, „Jede Tochter aber sollt ihr am Leben lassen!“ – Beobachtungen zu Ex 1,15–2,10 und seinem Kontext aus literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive,“ *BN* 55 (1990): 47–76, 73f.; Irmtraud Fischer, „Wer lehrt in Israel Soziales?“, in *Christliche Sozialethik im Dialog: Zur Zukunftsfähigkeit von Wirtschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft. Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Lothar Roos*, ed. Ursula Nothelle-Wildfeuer und Norbert Glatzel (Grafchaft: Vektor, 2000), 45–54; 48f.; Robert B. Lawton, „Irony in Early Exodus,“ *ZAW* 97 (1985): 414. Angesichts eines vielfach untersuchten Textes wie dem Exodusbuch wird bewusst nur das unbedingt Nötige zitiert. Zudem beschränke ich mich auf die masoretische Textgestalt und eine synchrone Perspektive.
 - 2 Vgl. z.B. Edgar Lapp, *Linguistik der Ironie* (Tübingen: Narr, 1992); Hannele Kohvakka, *Ironie und Text* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1997); Joana Garmendia, *Irony: Key Topics in Semantics and Pragmatics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975); Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie* (3rd ed. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2021) usw. Nicht alle Erkenntnisse sind auf Bibeltexte übertragbar. Für eine Zusammenschau und Adaption auf die Bibelwissenschaften vgl. z.B. Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 13–33; Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana

ein (gesprochener oder geschriebener) Text neben dem Gesagten immer auch Nicht-Gesagtes enthält, das bei der Rezeption „durch kognitive Schlussoperationen“³ unter Einbezug des Kotextes, Kontextes und (Welt-)Wissens ergänzt werden muss, wofür eine gemeinsame Grundlage von sprachlichen Mitteln, semantischer Bedeutung, Erfahrungswissen usw. nötig ist.⁴ Dieser „freie Bereich“ des Nicht-Gesagten, aber Mit-Gemeinten wird bei ironischen Äußerungen benutzt, um neben der wörtlichen eine nicht-wörtliche Bedeutung des Gesagten einzubeziehen. Ironie kann, wie Guglielmi es für Humor im Allgemeinen definiert, als „ein Verfahren [gelten], das Wirklichkeitselemente so anleuchtet, daß sie entstellt werden“⁵. Sie wird üblicherweise als Kritik verstanden, inkludiert also eine Bewertung einer Person oder eines Sachverhalts.⁶ Dies kann eher versteckt oder auch offen und leicht erkennbar geschehen, je nachdem welchem Zweck die Ironie dient.⁷

Die Antike definiert rhetorische Ironie, d.h. eine Stilfigur der Rede, die im Dienste der Argumentation steht, als Ausdrucksform, die das Gegenteil von dem meint, was gesagt wird.⁸ Dabei wird zwischen der *simulatio*, d.h. der vorgetäuschten Identifikation mit der Meinung des Gegenübers, und der *dissimulatio*, dem Verbergen der eigenen Absicht und Kenntnisse,

University Press, 2009), 6–42; Tobias Häner, *Gottes Fragen: Ironie und Ambiguität im Ijobbuch* (Wien: Habil. masch. Universität, 2021), Kap. 2 – ich danke T. Häner für die Möglichkeit, in seine noch nicht publizierte Habilitationsschrift Einsicht nehmen zu können.

- 3 Margot Heinemann und Wolfgang Heinemann, *Grundlagen der Textlinguistik: Interaktion – Text – Diskurs* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2002) 43.
- 4 Vgl. Heinemann/Heinemann, *Grundlagen der Textlinguistik*, 43f.; ähnlich Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 29; 44; Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 43–45; Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, if. u.a.
- 5 Waltraud Guglielmi, „Probleme bei der Anwendung der Begriffe ‚Komik‘, ‚Ironie‘ und ‚Humor‘ auf die altägyptische Literatur“, *GöMis* 36 (1979): 69–85, 69. Zur Abgrenzung von Ironie, Humor, Sarkasmus und anderen Stilformen vgl. Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 23–30; ferner Garmendia, *Irony*, 9f.; 126–146.
- 6 Vgl. Garmendia, *Irony*, 88–106; Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 22; Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 30. Daher wird Ironie von Matthiae eher in der Nähe von „Hass“ / „Spott“ angesiedelt als in der Nähe von „Liebe“ / „Humor“; vgl. Gisela Matthiae, „Humor (AT)“, in *Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*, July 2009, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/21610>, Abb. 1; Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 72.
- 7 Vgl. Heinrich F. Plett, *Einführung in die rhetorische Textanalyse* (Rev. and enl. ed. Hamburg: Helmut Buske, 2001), 120f.
- 8 Vgl. hierzu Plett, *Einführung*, 116–120; Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft* (München: Hueber, 1973), §§ 582–585; im Registerband 729–731; Elisabeth Vollers-Sauer, „Ironie“, in *Metzler Lexikon Sprache*, ed. Helmut Glück (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2000), 319; Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 171–173; Japp, *Linguistik der Ironie*, 21f. Daneben kannte die Antike den *eirōn* als Charaktertyp, der durch Unterbreitung täuscht (vgl. Japp, *Linguistik der Ironie*, 18–20; Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 14–17), ähnlich der *dissimulatio*.

unterschieden. Letztere wird besonders Sokrates zugeschrieben, der Unwissenheit vortäuschte und mit „naiven“ Fragen seine Gesprächspartner als unwissend bloßstellte. Zur rhetorischen Ironie kann auch „alltägliche“ verbale Ironie gezählt werden.⁹

In der Epoche der Romantik wurde der Ironiebegriff auf Literatur und zugleich auf eine bestimmte Sicht auf die Welt ausgeweitet, die die Wahrnehmung bis heute prägt (moderne und postmoderne Ironie).¹⁰ Kennzeichnend ist ein Bruch zwischen der Wahrnehmung der Welt und ihrem eigentlichen Wesen. Spätestens hier wird deutlich, dass Ironie nicht nur das *Gegenteil* des Gesagten implizieren kann, sondern etwas *anderes* als die wörtliche Bedeutung nahelegt.¹¹

Eine weitere Form der Ironie, die für bestimmte Teile der Bibel besonders wichtig ist, ist die dramatische oder narrative Ironie.¹² Sie hat ihre Ursprünge in der antiken Tragödie und Komödie, auch wenn sie damals noch nicht als Ironie bezeichnet wurde. Als Merkmal gilt, dass das Publikum etwas weiß, was eine Figur (noch) nicht weiß (z.B. in Sophokles' *König Ödipus*).¹³ Shimon Bar-Efrat erweitert dies um zwei Aspekte: „[...] wenn eine Person unwissend etwas tut, was ihr nicht zum Besten gereicht, oder wenn die Folge der Ereignisse zu Ergebnissen führt, die das Gegenteil der eigentlichen Ziele einer Person sind.“¹⁴ Ironie in erzählenden Texten kann punktuell, episodisch oder thematisch eingesetzt werden,¹⁵ sich also in ihrer Auswirkung im Verhältnis zum Umfang des Werkes unterscheiden. Dass ganze Texte ironisch zu verstehen sind, betrifft u.a. Romane der Romantik, Satiren usw.¹⁶

Auch wenn es ironische Effekte gibt, die erst bei der Rezeption entstehen – etwa wenn Entstehungs- und Rezeptionskontext Verschiebungen aufweisen – ist doch deutlich, dass Ironie bereits auf der Produktionsseite angelegt und

9 Vgl. René Nünlist, „Rhetorische Ironie – Dramatische Ironie: Definitions- und Interpretationsprobleme,“ in *Zwischen Tradition und Innovation. Poetische Verfahren im Spannungsfeld Klassischer und Neuerer Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. Jürgen P. Schwindt (München: K. G. Sauer, 2000), 67–87; 71–77.

10 Vgl. Plett, *Einführung*, 122f.; Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 168–170.

11 Vgl. Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 38; 176; Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 22; Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 17–24.

12 Vgl. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Wie die Bibel erzählt: Alttestamentliche Texte als literarische Kunstwerke verstehen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2006), 138–143; Nünlist, „Rhetorische Ironie,“ 81–86; Plett, *Einführung*, 123; Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 81f.; Guglielmi, „Probleme,“ 74f.

13 Vgl. Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 64–66.

14 Bar-Efrat, *Wie die Bibel erzählt*, 138.

15 Vgl. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 81f.

16 Vgl. hierzu bes. Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, *passim*.

intentional in einen Text hineingelegt werden kann.¹⁷ Diese Absicht muss bei der Rezeption aber auch erkannt und das *andere* Gemeinte eruiert und konstruiert werden. Das wirft die Frage auf, welche Signale und Mittel in einem Text Ironie markieren.¹⁸ Auch hier hat die Forschung keine einheitlichen Ergebnisse erbracht, was wiederum an der Vielfältigkeit der ironischen Phänomene liegt. Es besteht aber weitgehender Konsens, dass im Text beobachtete Kontrastphänomene von größter Bedeutung sind.¹⁹ Auf der propositionalen Ebene können (logische, argumentative, semantische) Widersprüche, Oppositionen, Inkongruenzen und Unter- oder Übertreibungen, sowohl gegenüber dem Kontext, als auch gegenüber dem zugrundeliegenden Weltwissen, auf Ironie hindeuten. Dazu gehört auch, wenn Figuren anders agieren, als von ihnen erwartet wird. Des Weiteren können Brüche im Stil auf Ironie hinweisen. Kontrastphänomene können zudem auf der Illokutions-Ebene auftreten.²⁰ Eine Inkongruenz zwischen ausgedrücktem und gemeintem illokutionären Gehalt liegt z.B. vor, wenn jemand „Danke!“ ruft, sich aber nicht bedanken, sondern Kritik üben will.

Ziele, die mittels Ironie erreicht werden sollen, sind ebenfalls vielfältig:²¹ Kritik üben, Personen oder Sachverhalte entlarven, lächerlich machen und in Frage stellen oder einfach ein Schmunzeln auslösen. Biblisch scheint Ironie zudem der Beeinflussung von Wertvorstellungen zu dienen²² oder „Ausdruck der Überzeugung [zu sein], dass es in der Welt Gerechtigkeit gibt und jeder

17 Vgl. Matthiae, „Humor“, Abschnitt 1.1.; Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 5; Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 2; 17f. Da der Entstehungskontext biblischer Texte schwer zu erheben ist, stellt natürlich auch die Rekonstruktion einer Text- oder gar Autor/innen-Intention eine erhebliche Schwierigkeit dar. Bewusste Ironie war in der Umwelt Israels offenbar bekannt, vgl. zu Ägypten Guglielmi, „Probleme“; Waltraud Guglielmi, „Der Gebrauch rhetorischer Stilmittel in der ägyptischen Literatur“, in *Ancient Egyptian Literature: History and Forms*, ed. Antonio Loprieno (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 465–497; 495–497.

18 Vgl. u.a. Guglielmi, „Gebrauch“, für Ägypten; Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 49–86 für literarische Texte; Plett, *Einführung*, 121f. für rhetorische Ironie; Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 50–55; 70 für Texte, die als Ganze ironisch sind (Satiren). Gestik, Mimik, Betonung, Druckbild usw. fallen für biblische Texte natürlich aus.

19 Vgl. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 30–32; Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 43–45; 66f.; Garmendia, *Irony*, 119–123; für Ägypten Guglielmi, „Probleme“, 70. Im Folgenden werden nur die wichtigsten der vielen Möglichkeiten aufgezählt. Lapp geht sogar davon aus, „daß praktisch *alles* Ironie signalisieren kann“ (Lapp, *Linguistik der Ironie*, 30).

20 Vgl. Lapp, *Linguistik der Ironie*, 160–168.

21 Vgl. z.B. Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 27f.; Bar-Efrat, *Wie die Bibel erzählt*, 138f.; Weber, „Jede Tochter“, 74.

22 Vgl. Kohvakka, *Ironie*, 52; Weber, „Jede Tochter“, 74.

und jede seinen oder ihren gerechten Lohn erhält – diese Annahme steht oft im Gegensatz zu der Annahme der jeweiligen Person“²³.

Indem das Augenmerk auf ironische Elemente in biblischen Texten gerichtet wird, erfolgt ein Eintritt in den Bereich des Nicht-Gesagten, aber Mit-Gemeinten, mithin in die Mehrdeutigkeit der Texte. Ironie zweifelsfrei aufzudecken ist gerade bei biblischen Texten aufgrund des Abstands zum Entstehungskontext ein schwieriges Unterfangen, mehr noch die Frage nach der Intention. Daher muss nach der Plausibilität einer ironischen Deutung gegenüber einem wörtlichen Verständnis gefragt werden.²⁴ Im Folgenden werden v.a. Kontrastphänomene als Ironie-Signale dargestellt, die nicht immer ganz auszudeuten sind, sondern für die teils mehrere Deutungen bereitgehalten und diskutiert werden.

2 Ironie im Exodusbuch

Das Exodusbuch zeigt gleich zu Beginn ironische Züge. Die Erzählung von der Bedrückung des hebräischen Volks durch Pharao (Ex 1,8–22) und von der Geburt, Aussetzung und Rettung des Mosekindes (2,1–10) weisen mehrere Formen „blanke[r] Ironie“²⁵ auf (2.1). Später kommt Ironie im Exodusbuch nur noch sporadisch vor und ist weniger leicht zu bestimmen. Diskutiert werden in 2.2 bzw. 2.3 Befunde im Berufsbericht des Mose (3,1–4,17) bzw. in Äußerungen des Volkes gegen Mose (14,11; 16,3).

2.1 *Exodus 1–2: Starke Frauen, törichter König*

Der Erzählzusammenhang Ex 1,1–2,22²⁶ handelt vom Ergehen des Volkes Israel in Ägypten (1,1–7; 1,8–14; 1,15–22), der Geburt und Rettung (2,1–10) sowie der Flucht des Mose und seiner Ankunft in Midian (2,11–22). Die Abschnitte, die von der Gefährdung der Kinder bzw. des Mose berichten (1,15–22; 2,1–10), sind durch Leitwörter (Tochter, Sohn, Kinder/Kind) und durch die thematische Fortführung (2,1–10 setzt die Kindestötung narrativ voraus) eng miteinander verknüpft; jedoch wird, was zuvor „kollektiv“ behandelt wurde, im zweiten Teil an einem individuellen Schicksal aufgezeigt.²⁷ Ironiesignale finden sich

23 Bar-Efrat, *Wie die Bibel erzählt*, 138f.

24 Vgl. Häner, *Gottes Fragen*, Kap. 2.

25 Fischer, „Wer lehrt“, 48.

26 Zur Struktur vgl. Helmut Utzschneider und Wolfgang Oswald, *Exodus 1–15* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 65; Rainer Albertz, *Exodus 1–18* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2012), 40f.; 55; Christoph Dohmen, *Exodus 1–18* (Freiburg: Herder, 2015), 90.

27 Vgl. Utzschneider/Oswald, *Exodus*, 85; Weber, „Jede Tochter“, 50f.; 54f.

gerade in diesen eng verbundenen Abschnitten und deren ebenfalls narrativ verknüpfter „Vorgeschichte“ von der Unterdrückung Israels (1,8–14). Sie sind am besten durch eine erläuternde Nacherzählung aufzuzeigen.

Der König von Ägypten hat Sorge, dass die Hebräer zu zahlreich und stark werden und sich im Kampf gegen Ägypten wenden könnten (1,9f.). Dass das Volk „größer und zahlreicher“ als das ägyptische Volk (רַב וְעֶצוֹם מִמֶּנּוּ 1,9) werden könnte, wie er befürchtet, dürfte unwahrscheinlich und eine Über-treibung sein.²⁸ Er fordert das ägyptische Volk auf, das israelitische Volk zu „überlisten“²⁹, d.h. er will sich weise (חָכָם) zeigen gegenüber den Israeliten, um deren weiteres Anwachsen und ihren Auszug aus Ägypten (וְעֵלָה מִן־הָאָרֶץ) zu verhindern (1,10) – am Ende des Erzählszusammenhangs stehen jedoch gerade der Auszug Israels aus Ägypten (עֵלָה 13,18)³⁰ und der Kampf JHWHs gegen Pharaos Streitmacht (14,14.25)! Was Pharao verhindern wollte, tritt ein.

Trotz der Zwangsmaßnahmen gegen Israel und der Belastung durch die Arbeit (1,11), ja sogar im selben Maße (כְּאִשֶּׁר) wie die Bedrückung zunimmt, so nimmt auch das Volk an Größe zu und breitet sich aus (בֶּן יִרְבֶּה וְכֹן יִפְרֹץ 1,12). Die Verwendung des Verbs רָבָה „zahlreich, mächtig werden“ in 1,10 und 1,12 sowie des Adjektivs רַב „zahlreich, groß“ in 1,9 verknüpft die Befürchtung Pharaos, seinen Plan und dessen Ergebnis. Doch die Maßnahmen erbringen nicht das gewünschte Ergebnis, sondern bewirken das Gegenteil; und zwar in übertriebener Weise: je mehr, desto stärker!³¹ Das Vorhaben des Königs erweist sich also nicht als „weise“. Die anfängliche Sorge wird zu Abscheu und Ekel (קִוִּץ 1,12), d.h. „eine stark emotionale, ja geradezu körperliche Abneigung (vgl. Num 22,3)³², die ebenfalls übertrieben wirkt. Als Abhilfe sollen Versklavung (עֲבָד hi. „dienstbar machen“) und noch härtere Behandlung dienen (1,13f.). Dass der Arbeitsdienst (עֲבָד hi., vgl. 2,23; 5,9.11; 6,6.9) später in Gottesdienst (עֲבָד hi., 27,19; 36,1.3; 39,40) mündet, stellt einen Gegensatz dar, der wie in 1,10 in die Buchkomposition hinausgreift.³³

Der König ersinnt außerdem einen weiteren Plan (1,15f.): Die Hebammen Schifra und Pua sollen bei der Geburt auf das Geschlecht der Kinder achten. Ein Sohn (בֶּן) soll sofort getötet werden, während eine Tochter (בַּת) am Leben

28 Vgl. Albertz, *Exodus*, 47; Jacob, *Exodus*, 8. Anders Dohmen, *Exodus*, 101, der hier nur die „Erfüllung der Mehrungsverheißung“ sieht. Der Bezug zu Verheißung (Gen 46,3) und Mehrung (Gen 47,27) ist zweifellos richtig und theologisch wichtig. Dennoch ist durch die Verwendung des Komparativs diese Erfüllung noch gesteigert und übertrieben.

29 Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift* (Gerlingen: Lambert Schneider, 1954).

30 Vgl. Lawton, „Irony in Early Exodus,” 414; Albertz, *Exodus*, 47; Propp, *Exodus*, 132.

31 Vgl. Albertz, *Exodus*, 47f.

32 Albertz, *Exodus*, 48.

33 Vgl. Albertz, *Exodus*, 48; Dohmen, *Exodus*, 88.

bleiben darf. Der Maßnahme scheint eine gewisse Heimlichkeit zu eignen, indem bei der damals hohen Sterberate von Neugeborenen eine sofortige Tötung wohl nicht auffallen sollte – die Unsinnigkeit dieses Gedankens betont Benno Jacob.³⁴ Die Heimlichkeit impliziert Furcht vor den Hebräern und stellt einen Gegensatz gegenüber der eigentlichen Machtfülle Pharaos dar. Dass der König im Gegensatz zu den einfachen Hebammen nicht mit Namen genannt wird, geht in eine ähnliche Richtung.

Die Differenzierung nach dem Geschlecht basiert auf der Annahme Pharaos, dass die herangewachsenen Söhne ihm und seinem ägyptischen Volk gefährlich werden können, während er von den Töchtern glaubt nichts befürchten zu müssen.³⁵ Dass die (hebräischen) Frauen³⁶ nicht so harmlos sind, wie der König meint, zeigt sich sogleich: Die Hebammen fürchten Gott und nicht Pharaon, handeln gegen die Anweisung und widersetzen sich dem Plan des Königs (1,17). Dem angedrohten Tod (מות, 1,16) der Söhne wird deren Leben (חיה, 1,17f.) entgegengesetzt. Als Pharaon die Hebammen danach befragt, tischen sie ihm eine hanebüchene Geschichte auf, nach der die Hebräerinnen „wie die Tiere“ (בִּיחִיּוֹת הַנֶּה, ³⁷ V. 19) bereits gebären, bevor die Hebamme vor Ort ist. Die Hebammen „überlisten“ mit ihrer Ausrede den König, d.h. sie sind klüger/weiser als er (vgl. 1,10), auch wenn חכם „weise sein“ nicht ausdrücklich genannt wird. Dabei bedienen sie sich des Stereotyps, das der ägyptische

34 Vgl. Jacob, *Exodus*, 14f.

35 Vgl. Fischer, „Wer lehrt“, 48; Renita J. Weems, „The Hebrew Women are not like the Egyptian Women: The Ideology of Race, Gender and Sexual Reproduction in Exodus 1,“ *Semeia* 59 (1992): 25–34, 29f.; Lawton, „Irony in Early Exodus.“ Allerdings wird der herangewachsene Mose tatsächlich zur Bedrohung, indem er einen ägyptischen Aufseher erschlägt (2,12) und das Volk aus Ägypten führt. Zur Gewalt von Männern und dem gewaltlosen Widerstand von Frauen in Ex 1–2 vgl. Fischer, „Wer lehrt“, 49. Zu den Frauen in Ex 1–2 vgl. z.B. Naomi Steinberg, „Feminist Criticism,“ in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 163–192; 172–184; Jo C. Exum, „Second Thoughts About Secondary Characters: Women in Exodus 1.8–2.10,“ in *A Feminist Companion to Exodus to Deuteronomy*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 75–87; Weber, „Jede Tochter,“ 52–64; Lawton, „Irony in Early Exodus,“ 414. Dohmen, *Exodus*, 106f. denkt hingegen an patrilineare Erb-/ Rechtsansprüche, die durch die Maßnahme verhindert würden.

36 Ob die Hebammen hebräische Frauen oder „Hebammen der Hebräerinnen“ (LXX), also evtl. ägyptischer Volkszugehörigkeit sind, lässt sich aus dem hebräischen Konsonantentext nicht bestimmen (vgl. Utzschneider/Oswald, *Exodus*, 79; Jacob, *Exodus*, 15). Für die Ironie ist es letztlich wenig bedeutsam, ob sie Hebräerinnen oder Ägypterinnen sind. Es sind *Frauen*, die die Pläne Pharaos durchkreuzen (s.u.). Die Zuschreibung von Gottesfurcht an *ägyptische* Hebammen könnte allerdings Ironie enthalten, wenn sie *israelitischen* Rezipierenden als beispielhaft vorgestellt werden.

37 חיות wird auch als „lebenskräftig“ übersetzt (vgl. z.B. Jacob, *Exodus*, 17; Dohmen, *Exodus*, 88). Beides dürfte hier mitschwingen.

König selbst pflegt: Die Angehörigen des hebräischen Volkes seien „anders“ als die Ägypter (deshalb fürchtet er sich so vor ihnen), nämlich weniger wert, wie „Tiere“.³⁸ Ob diese Bezeichnung neben dem verachtenden Akzent doppeldeutig auch „als Respektsbezeugung gegenüber dem gefährdeten israelitischen Volk“ (wohl im Sinne ihrer Lebenskräftigkeit) und demnach als „Witz [...]“, der die Adressaten zum Schmunzeln bringen soll“³⁹, zu verstehen ist? Das Stereotyp wird jedenfalls benutzt und ins Extreme gesteigert („Tiere“), dient aber letztlich der gegenteiligen Wirkung: statt getötet zu werden, bleiben die Kinder dank der Gottesfurcht und Klugheit der Hebammen unbehelligt. Wieder erreicht Pharao nicht sein Ziel, das Volk zu schwächen, sondern es wird weiterhin größer und sehr stark (וִירֵב הָעָם וַיַּעֲצֻמוּ מְאֹד, 1,20) – erneut wird das Verb רָבָה „zahlreich, mächtig werden“ verwendet.

Schließlich lässt Pharao alle Heimlichkeit fahren und gibt seinem ganzen Volk den Befehl, alle neugeborenen Söhne in den Nil zu werfen; die Töchter dürfen weiterhin am Leben bleiben (1,22) – offenbar unterschätzt er Frauen weiterhin. Töchter sind im Folgenden zentrale Figuren, um den künftigen Retter, Mose, vor dem Tod zu erretten: die „Tochter Levis“ (2,1) und die „Tochter Pharaos“ (2,5) werden nicht mit Namen genannt, sondern als „Tochter“ (בַּת) und damit genau als diejenigen bezeichnet, die Pharao offenbar für ungefährlich hielt. Sie – darunter ausgerechnet die Tochter Pharaos! – durchkreuzen seine Pläne, alle männlichen Nachkommen Israels zu töten.

Statt in den Nil *geworfen* zu werden (שָׁלַךְ, 1,22), um zu sterben, wird Mose von seiner Mutter, der „Tochter Levis“, sachte in einem Kästchen in den Nil *gesetzt* (שָׂם, 2,3), von der „Tochter Pharaos“ entdeckt und von deren Magd aus dem Wasser gezogen (2,5). Ihr Handeln ist „nach dem Buchstaben nicht angreifbar“⁴⁰, denn Pharao sprach ja nicht von „töten“ und das Kind war ja im Fluss gelandet. Die Mutter des Knaben darf ihn als Amme aufziehen und erhält sogar Lohn dafür.

Der Sohn (בֶּן), der eigentlich den Tod finden sollte (1,16.22), wird als Sohn (בֶּן) der Tochter Pharaos aufgezogen (2,10). Wieder einmal ist der Plan Pharaos ins Gegenteil verkehrt, zumindest was diesen Jungen angeht. Die Frauen erweisen sich in Ex 1–2 als Lebens-Retterinnen, die den männlichen, todbringenden

38 Gale A. Yee, „Postcolonial Biblical Criticism“, in *Methods for Exodus*, ed. Thomas B. Dozeman (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 193–234: 218; Weems, „Hebrew Women“, 29f.; Jürgen Ebach, „Frauen bleiben im Rahmen, Frauen fallen aus dem Rahmen: Bibelarbeit über 2. Mose 1,1–2,10“, in *Vielfalt ohne Beliebigkeit*, ed. Jürgen Ebach (Bochum: SWI, 2002), 94–115; 103.

39 Albertz, *Exodus*, 51.

40 Jacob, *Exodus*, 19.

Machtplänen entgegenwirken. Sie können als weibliche Trickster-Figuren⁴¹ gesehen werden, die klüger sind als Pharao, der sich „weise“ (1,10) dünkt, aber letztlich als Narr dasteht.⁴²

Exodus 1–2 enthält als Ironiesignale zahlreiche Kontrastphänomene, vor allem auf propositionaler Ebene:⁴³

- Das Volk Israel nimmt an Größe zu statt ab;
- am Ende kommt es zu dem Auszug und Kampf, die der König befürchtet;
- der Plan Pharaos ist nicht so „weise“ wie gedacht; die Hebammen sind klüger als er; zusätzlicher Kontrast entsteht, da Ägypten als *das* Land der Weisheit gilt;⁴⁴
- die Heimlichkeit des Plans steht der Machtfülle Pharaos entgegen; seine Namenlosigkeit der namentlichen Nennung der Hebammen;
- gegen den Tod der Söhne steht deren Leben, speziell das des Mose;
- Frauen und Töchter sind „gefährlicher“ als Söhne, indem sie deren Leben retten;⁴⁵
- Mose wird vorsichtig in den Nil *gesetzt* statt *geworfen*;
- ausgerechnet die Tochter Pharaos rettet das Kind.⁴⁶

Dazu kommen einige Fälle von Übertreibung:

- Pharao befürchtet ein übermäßiges Anwachsen der Israeliten;
- größere Bedrückung bewirkt ein umso stärkeres Anwachsen;
- die Ägypter empfinden schließlich Abscheu/Ekel;
- die hebräischen Mütter gebären „wie Tiere“;
- ausgerechnet die eigene Mutter darf den geretteten Sohn pflegen.⁴⁷

41 Zum Trickster vgl. Matthiae, „Humor“, Kap. 3,3,4; Jo C. Exum and Johanna W. H. Bos, *Reasoning with the Foxes: Female Wit in a World of Male Power = Semeia* 42 (1988).

42 Vgl. Utzschneider/Oswald, *Exodus*, 85; Weems, „Hebrew Women“, 29; 31; Brevard S. Childs, „The Birth of Moses“, *JBL* 84 (1965): 109–122; 120, verweist auf den weisheitlichen Ort dieses Motivs und parallelisiert den törichten König mit Haman im ebenfalls ironisch geprägten Esterbuch. Jacob (*Exodus*, 19) spricht vom „Wahnsinn“ Pharaos.

43 Vgl. Propp, *Exodus*, 153f.; Weber, „Jede Tochter“, 52–64.

44 Vgl. Propp, *Exodus*, 131.

45 Vgl. Jo C. Exum, „You Shall Let Every Daughter Live: A Study of Exodus 1:8–2:10“, *Semeia* 28 (1983): 63–82; 74f.; Fischer, „Wer lehrt“, 48: „Die weiblichen Volksglieder Israels arbeiten [...] wesentlich wirksamer gegen den Pharao als die Männer, die sich korrumpieren lassen.“

46 Die häufig positiv bewertete Tochter Pharaos erhält einen negativen, wiederum ironischen Aspekt, da sie unbewusst ihren Vater töricht erscheinen lässt und damit selbst töricht dasteht, auch weil sie sich von Moses Schwester täuschen lässt und, wie die Etymologie des Mose-Namens (2,10) zeigt, nicht besonders gut die hebräische Sprache beherrscht (Yee, „Postcolonial Biblical Criticism“, 221).

47 Vgl. Childs, „Birth of Moses“, 115. Der nicht zufällige „Zufall“ wird als stilistische Übertreibung aufgefasst.

Aufgrund der zahlreichen Signale ist die Ironie in Ex 1–2 leicht zu bestimmen. Sie ist als narrativ-episodisch zu kategorisieren, da sie sich innerhalb der Erzählungen nicht in einem Punkt konzentriert, sondern in der Zusammenschau von über den Text verteilten Signalen zu eruieren ist. Auch thematische Ironie ist enthalten, da das Thema des Hinaufziehens aus dem Land und des Kampfs gegen Ägypten (1,10) sich erst in späteren Episoden (v.a. Ex 14) als ironisch auflöst.

Die Erzählung arbeitet mit Kontrasten, die kulturell vorausgesetzt werden:⁴⁸ Der eigentlich mächtige und weise Pharao unterliegt dem vermeintlich schwachen Volk Israel; gegen seine todbringenden Pläne siegt das Leben. Dabei wirken Vorstellungen des „Andersseins“ mit: Israel wird von Ägypten als „fremd“ und minderwertig wahrgenommen – und so soll es auch bleiben: klein an Zahl, Stärke, Wohlstand; dem „Gastland“ dienstbar. Mädchen und Frauen werden in der patriarchalen Kultur als Unterlegene und Machtlose wahrgenommen, die keine Gefahr darstellen. Dennoch geschieht es anders als vom Erwartungshorizont vorgegeben: Israel vermehrt sich und wird stark, die Pläne Pharaos werden durch Frauen⁴⁹ vereitelt. Dass dahinter der Plan und die Verheißung JHWHs stehen, ändert nichts an der ironischen Darstellung.

Die ironische Gestaltung dürfte intentional in den Text hineingelegt sein, da sie durch viele Signale gestützt wird und das Gemeinte klar herausgearbeitet werden kann. Das Ziel der ironischen Ausführung ist, hegemoniale Ansprüche – im Bild Ägyptens und Pharaos – zu kritisieren und lächerlich zu machen. Der bekannten Wirklichkeit – kleines Volk unterliegt der Großmacht – wird eine andere Möglichkeit der Wirklichkeit⁵⁰ entgegengesetzt. Das Schmunzeln⁵¹, das durch die ironische Darstellung erzeugt wird, schafft Gemeinschaft derer, die die Ironie verstehen, gegenüber den Opfern der Ironie. Es ist ein Lachen „von unten nach oben, mit dem Minderheiten oder unterdrückte Bevölkerungsgruppen feinen bis offenkundigen Widerstand signalisieren. [...] Spott, Satire

48 Vgl. zum Folgenden u.a. Weems, „Hebrew Women,“ 30–32; Yee, „Postcolonial Biblical Criticism,“ 215–221; Fischer, „Wer lehrt,“ 48f.

49 Die zentrale Bedeutung der Frauen erscheint für eine feministische Exegese auf den ersten Blick positiv, wird aber dadurch abgeschwächt, dass Frauen nur als Kontrastfiguren dienen und ihre schwache gesellschaftliche Position eher betont als aufgehoben wird. Ähnlich Susanne Scholz, „Exodus: Was Befreiung aus ‘seiner’ Sicht bedeutet ...“ in *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Gütersloh: Gütersloher 1999), 26–39; 28, die darin die „eigentliche Ironie der androzentrischen Erzählweise“ sieht und betont: „Solange sie innerhalb der typischen Frauenaufgaben bleiben, läßt der androzentrische Schreiber sie sogar den Pharao überlisten.“ Zum gewandelten feministischen Blick auf Ex 1–2 vgl. Exum, „Second Thoughts“.

50 Vgl. Japp, *Theorie der Ironie*, 16–18.

51 Vgl. Albertz, *Exodus*, 51; 60.

und Ironie von unten nach oben kommt in den alttestamentlichen Texten als Auflehnung gegen Herrschaft und Unterdrückung sehr häufig vor.⁵² Dass die der Erzählung inhärente Stimme pro-israelitisch ist, ist durch den Bezug auf die Nachkommen Israels leicht zu erkennen. Schwieriger zu bestimmen ist, wer als Opfer der Fremdironie gelten kann, da „Ägypten“ auch als Chiffre für andere Großmächte stehen kann.

Die Verwendung von Ironie in Ex 1–2 trägt dazu bei, die Lesenden zu unterhalten und die Geschichte spannender zu machen. Andererseits werden diese, wenn sie sich in einer unterlegenen Position empfinden, darin bestärkt, dass es noch eine andere mögliche Wirklichkeit neben der vorfindlichen geben könnte. Eine literarhistorische Verortung von Ex 1–2 ist daher in historischen Kontexten plausibel, in denen „Israel“ sich einer Großmacht unterlegen fühlte.⁵³

2.2 *Exodus 4,10: Der beredte Mose mit der „schweren Zunge“*

Das zweite Beispiel für Ironie im Exodusbuch ist lokal begrenzter, jedoch schwieriger zu bewerten. Es betrifft den vierten Einwand Moses (4,10) gegen seine Berufung (3,1–4,17). Der Text ist nach dem sogenannten prophetischen Berufungsschema⁵⁴ gestaltet, das folgende Elemente enthält: Andeutung der Not (2,23; 3,7.9), Auftrag (3,10), Einwand (3,11.13; 4,1.10.13), Zusicherung (3,12.14f.; 4,12.15f.) und Zeichen (3,12; 4,2–9). Auffällig ist, dass das Element des Einwands fünfmal auftritt, so häufig wie in keiner weiteren Berufungserzählung. Der Widerstand des Mose gegen seine Beauftragung drückt sich in immer weniger stichhaltigen Einwänden aus. Die erste zögernde Frage, „Wer bin ich, dass ich zu Pharao gehen und die Israeliten aus Ägypten führen könnte?“ (3,11) entspricht üblichen Einwänden bei Berufungen (z.B. Jer 1,6) und ist in ihrer Demut durchaus angemessen. Auch die Frage nach der Identität des Sendenden (Ex 3,13) ist vernünftig, ebenso der Zweifel, ob man Mose glauben werde (4,1). Am Ende gehen Mose aber scheinbar die Argumente aus, wenn er bittet: „Sende doch, durch wen du senden magst בִּידֶתְשִׁלַח!“ (4,13), d.h. jeden anderen, nur nicht mich! Sein Versuch, um den Auftrag heranzukommen, nimmt schon

52 Matthiae, „Humor“ Kap. 1.2.2.; vgl. Fischer, „Wer lehrt,“ 49; Yee, „Postcolonial Biblical Criticism,“ 215.

53 Vgl. z.B. Andreas Michel, „Exodus – historisch, mythisch, theologisch,“ in *Der immer neue Exodus. Aneignungen und Transformationen des Exodusmotivs*, ed. Carolin Neuber (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2018), 20–44; 34–40.

54 Z.B. Ri 6; Jer 1; vgl. Wolfgang Richter, *Die sogenannten vorprophetischen Berufungsberichte* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1970); Aaron Schar, „Berufung / Berufsbericht (AT),“ in *Das wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet*, August 2010, <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/15008/>, Kap. 4.1; Georg Fischer und Martin Hasitschka, *Auf dein Wort hin. Berufung und Nachfolge in der Bibel* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia, 1995), 16f.

dadurch ironische Züge an, weil es dem erwarteten Schema und der Rolle eines Propheten – auch dem von den Lesenden evtl. vorgefassten Bild des herausragenden Mose (Dtn 34,10–12) – widerspricht.

Im vierten Einwand bringt Mose Bedenken vor, die durchaus berechtigt sein könnten, wenn sie nicht durch die Formulierung selbst schon widerlegt würden. Mose wendet mit großer Höflichkeit⁵⁵ (בי אדני „ach, Herr“, vgl. Gen 44,18; Ri 6,15) ein, dass er kein guter Redner sei, „kein Mann von Worten (לא איש דברים אנכי), weder gestern noch vorgestern noch seit du zu deinem Knecht redest (גם מתמול גם משלשם גם מאז דברך אל-עבדך), denn schwer an Mund und schwer an Zunge bin ich (כי כבד-פה וכבד לשון אנכי)“ (Ex 4,10). In einer prophetischen Berufung liegt der Einwand, nicht gut genug reden zu können, zwar nahe (vgl. Jer 1,6–9), so dass der propositionale Gehalt keinen Anstoß bietet. Doch der Ausspruch des Mose ist zumindest eine bescheidene Untertreibung, denn „ein genaueres Untersuchen seines Redens – sei es hier, sei es im weiteren Verlauf des Exodusbuches – zeigt, daß Mose ein blendender Redner ist. Sind schon die ersten drei Einwände sprachliche Glanzstücke, so ist 4,10 mit zwei für die Bibel singulären Ausdrücken („Mann von Worten“, „schwerfälliger Mund“), der ausgewogensten dreigliederigen Zeitformel und den demütigen Selbstbezeichnungen geradezu ein kleines literarisches Meisterwerk. Die Behauptung des Mose, nicht reden zu können, ist ein sprachlich überzeugender Beweis seiner überdurchschnittlichen Beredsamkeit.“⁵⁶

Demnach liegt ein deutlich erkennbares, dem Text inhärentes Kontrastphänomen vor: ein Widerspruch zwischen dem propositionalen Gehalt (nicht redegewandt) und der stilistischen Ausführung (redegewandt), der als Signal auf einen (intendierten) ironischen Effekt hinweisen könnte. Davon kann aber nur ausgegangen werden, wenn dieser den Text plausibler erklärt als das wörtliche Verständnis. Da die genannte Diskrepanz bereits früh zu Deutungsversuchen geführt hat – etwa ob Mose unter einem Sprachfehler litt – aber dadurch nicht völlig erklärt werden konnte⁵⁷, soll im Folgenden ein ironisches Verständnis diskutiert werden.

55 Vgl. Albertz, *Exodus*, 91; Cornelis Houtman, *Exodus Vol. 1* (Kampen: Kok, 1993), 404.

56 Fischer/Hasitschka, *Auf dein Wort hin*, 28. Ähnlich Georg Fischer und Dominik Markl, *Das Buch Exodus* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2009), 65f. Nach Dohmen (*Exodus*, 170) hat sich Mose „im laufenden Gespräch mit Gott durchaus als wortgewandt und diskussionsfreudig erwiesen“. Auch die große Menge an wörtlicher Rede, die der Text Mose zuschreibt, weist darauf hin. Im Dtn wird Mose ebenfalls als Redner charakterisiert. Propp, *Exodus*, 210: „[I]s there a touch of irony?“ Anders Houtman, *Exodus*, 408f., der Moses Einwand als Kritik an mangelnder Zurüstung durch Gott versteht.

57 Z.B. Stottern (so schon LXX, Rashi), was aber von der Bezeichnung כבד „schwer, lastend, drückend“ her nicht überzeugt (vgl. Houtman, *Exodus*, 408f. mit weiteren Vorschlägen; Dohmen, *Exodus*, 170; Propp, *Exodus*, 210f.). Vgl. ferner Jacob, *Exodus*, 82.

Betrachtet man die Rede auf Figurenebene, liegt auf den ersten Blick das Stilmittel der *dissimulatio* (Verbergen) vor, das zur rhetorischen Ironie gehört und vom Redner benutzt wird, um sich vor dem Publikum klein zu machen und sich „die Sympathie seines Publikums zu sichern“⁵⁸. Plett führt als Beispiel einen Ausschnitt aus der Rede des Antonius aus Shakespeares Drama *Julius Caesar* (III.ii) an, der mit der Äußerung des Mose überraschende Ähnlichkeit hat:

I am no orator, as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man, [...]
For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
To stir men's blood: I only speak right on.⁵⁹

Antonius betreibt in seiner Rede „Selbstverkleinerung“, aber „[d]ass er sehr wohl der klassisch geschulte Redner ist, beweist die Rede selbst“, und dass er nicht bloß ein einfacher Mann ist, „zeigen seine Handlungen vor und nach der Rede“⁶⁰. Er will nicht erreichen, dass seine Zuhörer ihn geringschätzen, sondern ihn aufgrund seiner vorgetäuschten Bescheidenheit hochschätzen. Die Rede des Antonius ist aber nicht nach einer antiken Vorlage zitiert, sondern von Shakespeare für die Figur formuliert. Es liegt also keine eigentliche rhetorische Ironie vor. Shakespeare benutzt die Stilfigur, um Antonius nicht nur innerhalb des Stücks zu charakterisieren, sondern auch gegenüber dem Theaterpublikum, das der Aufführung von *Julius Caesar* beiwohnt. Es sind demnach zwei Ebenen zu berücksichtigen: die Ebene der Figuren und die Ebene zwischen Text und Rezipierenden.⁶¹

Die Äußerung Moses in 4,10 erscheint zunächst der des Antonius ähnlich. Doch auf der Figurenebene meint Mose seine Aussage über mangelnde Redekunst durchaus ernst. Sein Ziel ist ja nicht, Gottes Sympathie und Hochschätzung zu erreichen, indem er sich kleiner macht; er will vielmehr tatsächlich als ungeeignet wahrgenommen werden, um dem Auftrag zu entgehen, wie der Kotext (seine mehrfachen, nicht-ironischen Einwände; vgl. v.a. 4,13!) zeigt – es sei denn, er lügt oder hält seine Fähigkeiten tatsächlich für geringer als sie sind. Der ironische Gehalt liegt also auf der Ebene zwischen Text und Lesenden.⁶² Wie bei der Rede des Antonius könnte der Effekt darauf zielen, beim „Publikum“ Sympathie zu erzeugen: Das Lächeln über Mose könnte

58 Plett, *Einführung*, 120.

59 Zitiert nach Plett, *Einführung*, 120.

60 Plett, *Einführung*, 120.

61 Ähnlich Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 42f.

62 Daher kann es nicht verwundern, dass JHWH keine Irritation zeigt (so Houtman, *Exodus*, 409).

die wiederholten Weigerungen abmildern. Der Kontrast zum höflichen, aber knappen fünften Einwand (4,13) lässt diesen dafür schroffer wirken.

Es bleiben verschiedene Deutungsmöglichkeiten für den Befund:

- Mose wird als Lügner dargestellt, um seiner Berufung zu entgehen. Dafür bietet der Kotext keine weiteren Anhaltspunkte.
- Der Einwand, nicht reden zu können, ist für die Berufung eines Propheten konstitutiv oder naheliegend,⁶³ wird aber nicht „naturalistisch“ (in schlechtem Hebräisch), sondern dem Stil des Buches angemessen formuliert. Die Ironie ist dann nicht im Text angelegt, sondern wird erst von moderner Rezeption wahrgenommen. Die ausgesprochen hohe Eloquenz spricht aber gegen eine schlichte Anpassung an den vorherrschenden Stil.
- Der Einwand will zeigen, dass Berufene ihre Fähigkeiten oft geringer einschätzen als sie sind.⁶⁴ Der Kontrast zwischen Stil und Inhalt verweist (ironisch?) auf eine „tiefere Dimension“⁶⁵, die jedoch m.E. Teil einer aktualisierenden Auslegung ist und psychologisierende Momente in die Figur des Mose hineinlegt, die dem Anliegen des Textes nicht entsprechen, weil eine solche Reflexion über die Fähigkeiten zur Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes damals nicht gefragt war. Auch hier überwiegt die Rezeptionsperspektive. Als auktoriale Ironie dagegen könnte die Diskrepanz darauf hinweisen, dass trotz der Eloquenz dennoch immer eine Zurüstung durch Gott nötig ist.
- Der Text spielt mit dem ironischen Effekt, der Sympathie für Mose erzeugt, die Reihe der Weigerungen abmildert und die Wertschätzung für Mose erhöht, indem Eloquenz und Bescheidenheit hervorgehoben werden.

Letztlich kann eine Entscheidung für oder gegen eine ironische Deutung von Ex 4,10 kaum getroffen werden, da zu wenig über die Textintention zu eruieren ist.

2.3 *Exodus 14,11; 16,3: Das vergessliche Volk*

Kurz sollen noch Äußerungen des Volkes in Ex 14,11 und 16,3 betrachtet werden. Während 14,11 noch vor dem Durchzug durchs Schilfmeer, aber schon in der Wüste (vgl. 13,20; 14,3) lokalisiert ist, gehört 16,3 zu den sogenannten „Murrerzählungen“ in der Wüste (15,22–27; 16,1–36; 17,1–7) vor der Ankunft am Sinai, die parallel zu weiteren Murrerzählungen nach dem Sinai (Num 11–14; 16f.; 20)

63 Vgl. z.B. Dohmen, *Exodus*, 170f.

64 Vgl. Fischer/Markl, *Exodus*, 66; Fischer/Hasitschka, *Auf dein Wort hin*, 28f. Fischer verweist auf Erfahrungen von heute in der Pastoral Tätigen sowie auf die grundsätzliche Schwierigkeit, von Gott glaubhaft in menschlicher Rede zu künden. Ähnlich Jacob, *Exodus*, 85 zu V. 13.

65 Fischer/Markl, *Exodus*, 66.

stehen. Gemeinsam ist 14,11 und den Murrerzählungen, dass Israel gegen Mose und JHWH aufbegehrt und gegen deren Handeln protestiert.

In Ex 14 erschrecken die Israeliten vor der anrückenden ägyptischen Streitmacht, rufen zu JHWH (14,10) und wenden sich an Mose: „Gibt es keine Gräber in Ägypten (המבלי אין־קברים במצרים), dass du uns genommen hast, um in der Wüste zu sterben? Was hast du uns getan, uns aus Ägypten zu führen?“ Die erste der beiden Fragen kann als punktuelle rhetorische Ironie verstanden werden.⁶⁶ Der propositionale Gehalt verweist auf einen Widerspruch zum Weltwissen: Selbstverständlich gibt es Gräber in Ägypten. Dass Ägypten *das* Land der Begräbniskultur ist, die Formulierung auf der anderen Seite das völlige Fehlen von Gräbern impliziert, stellt eine Übertreibung dar. Auch die Form als rhetorische Frage kann als Signal gelten. Auf der illokutionären Ebene erweist sich die vermeintliche Frage als Kritik bzw. Klage. Es geht gar nicht darum, ob es Gräber in Ägypten gibt. Vielmehr ist etwas anderes gemeint, das aus 14,12 deutlich wird: Noch in Ägypten habe das Volk zu Mose gesagt, es sei besser in Ägypten zu dienen als in der Wüste zu sterben. Sie aus Ägypten herauszuführen sei eine schlechte Idee gewesen, weil es den Tod bedeute.

Im Unterschied zu 4,10 liegt die Ironie auf der Ebene der Figuren. Die Rede des Volkes ist bewusst ironisch gegenüber Mose eingesetzt, um – wie der Kotext zeigt – starke Kritik zu äußern. Diese wendet sich zunächst gegen Mose und sein Tun am Volk, letztlich aber gegen Gottes Plan, der hinter diesem Tun steht. Die Rede des Volkes reagiert damit auf die unmittelbare Gefahr durch die Streitmacht und schaut in die Vergangenheit zurück, während Mose in seiner Antwort auf das unmittelbar bevorstehende Handeln JHWHs aufmerksam macht (14,13f.).⁶⁷ Der Abschnitt 13,20–14,31 endet mit Israels Anerkennung der Macht JHWHs, so dass in Widerstand und Glauben des Volkes, d.h. der Frage seiner Gottesbeziehung, ein Thema der Erzählung gesehen werden kann, die zudem Mose als Mittler vorbereitet.⁶⁸ Die Kritik wird durch die rhetorische Frage einerseits nur indirekt ausgedrückt, andererseits verstärkt, da sie durch die implizierte Todesfolge und die Übertreibung dieses Aspekts („keine Gräber“) auf die Sinnlosigkeit und Aussichtslosigkeit des Unterfangens aufmerksam macht: Es hätte Gräber in Ägypten gegeben – also wozu das Ganze?

Da die Lesenden durch die Ironiesignale auf Mit-Gemeintes aufmerksam gemacht werden, durchschauen sie die Ironie. Die Wirkung auf dieser Ebene wird in 16,3 noch deutlicher: „Wer gäb’s, dass wir gestorben wären durch die

66 Vgl. Propp, *Exodus*, 494; Fischer/Markl, *Exodus*, 157; Albertz, *Exodus*, 241, der sie als „zynisch“ bezeichnet.

67 Vgl. Dohmen, *Exodus*, 326.

68 Vgl. Dohmen, *Exodus*, 320f.

Hand JHWHs im Land Ägypten, als wir an den Fleischtöpfen saßen, als wir uns satt essen konnten an Brot.“ Auffällig ist die Verklärung der Vergangenheit in Ägypten, die aufgrund ihrer Diskrepanz zur Darstellung in Ex 1f. auf der Rezeptionsebene ebenfalls ironisch wirkt.⁶⁹ Statt an Ausbeutung und Massennord erinnert sich Israel an gute Nahrungsversorgung.⁷⁰ Die Kritik an Mose fällt damit auf das Volk zurück, da sie lächerlich erscheint.

3 Fazit

Schon im begrenzten Textumfang Ex 1–18 finden sich mehrere Ironie-Formen, die mit verschiedensten Signalen und Zielen verbunden sind. Es zeigt sich aber auch, dass die Entscheidung über Vorhandensein und pragmatische Wirkung der Ironie nicht leichtfällt. Ironie ist eines der flüchtigsten und umstrittensten Stilmittel, bei dem vieles im subjektiven Urteil der Rezipierenden liegt.⁷¹ Bei biblischen Texten scheint es eine Scheu zu geben, Ironie wahrzunehmen. Es würde zu weit führen, jede Literatur anzuführen, die die diskutierten Stellen *nicht* ironisch interpretiert. Die hier vorgebrachten Argumente wollen dagegen einen anderen Blick auf die Texte anregen und einen Beitrag zur intersubjektiven Diskussion über Ironie leisten.

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- 69 Von „Skepsis“ der Lesenden spricht Christian Kupfer, *Mit Israel auf dem Weg durch die Wüste. Eine leseorientierte Exegese der Rebellionstexte in Exodus 15:22–17:7 und Numeri 11:1–20:13* (Boston: Brill, 2012), 59f. Meist werden die Diskrepanzen ohne Ironie erklärt, z.B. als Zeichen für die Schwere der Rebellion, vgl. George W. Coats, *Rebellion in the Wilderness: The Murmuring Motif in the Wilderness Traditions of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1968), 88f.
- 70 Das wird in Num 11,4f. durch die Aufzählung immer banalerer Lebensmittel gesteigert, vgl. Francis Landy, „Humour as a Tool for Biblical Exegesis,“ in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Yehuda T. Raddai and Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 99–115; 111–115.
- 71 Vgl. z.B. Nünlist, „Rhetorische Ironie,“ 78; Sharp, „Irony and Meaning,“ 4f.

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Is Leviticus Ironic? Exploring Narratival and Priestly Ironies in the Center of the Torah

Mark A. Awabdy

The appropriation of irony research from literary criticism into biblical studies has been fruitful but conflicting. In a post-deconstructionist world,¹ we say, on the one hand, that it is impossible to determine whether an author intended to communicate ironically, and on the other hand, that all ambiguity in literature is ironic.² Thus, Stanley Fish concludes: “Irony and ambiguity are not properties of language but functions of the expectations with which we approach it.”³ In practice, this means that irony is detached from the ironist, but nonetheless, we still collectively identify irony when we hear it or read it. We will not always come to a “compelling consensus”⁴ about the presence of irony, but we instinctively recognize when something is said or acted ironically, albeit for many different reasons. But some will not catch the irony. Thus, irony exposes a hierarchy of discursive communities that already existed: those who use irony (ironists), those who comprehend it and those who do not.⁵ Of course, those in the know can use irony as a power tool to protect their own elite status and exclude the ignorant, but it does seem that for many skilled ironists in different eras and cultures “the building of amiable communities is often far more important than the exclusion of naïve victims.”⁶

1 Especially after Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Michel Foucault, and Richard Rorty.

2 Noted by Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 15.

3 Stanley Fish, “Normal Circumstances, Literal Language, Direct Speech Acts, the Ordinary, the Everyday, the Obvious, What Goes without Saying, and Other Special Cases,” in *Is There a Text in this Class?* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 268–292 (277); repr. of *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978): 625–644.

4 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: New Left Books, 1974), 210.

5 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1995), 17.

6 Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 23.

1 Defining and Discovering Irony

Defining irony is a notoriously thorny task. In general, irrespective of its mode of communication, irony, Didier Luciani notes, involves a “tension transparente entre le message littéral et le message vrai.”⁷ Irony also requires an element of surprise for the observer, listener, or reader: “D’autres fois, c’est la simple juxtaposition de deux éléments ou de deux réalités paradoxales ou non congruentes qui suffit à créer la surprise et à faire naître une ironie de situation.”⁸ For literary or discursive irony, in particular, Carolyn Sharp offers this working definition:

Irony is a performance of misdirection that generates aporetic interactions between an unreliable “said” and a truer “unsaid” so as to persuade us of something that is subtler, more complex, or more profound than the apparent meaning. Irony disrupts cultural assumptions about the narrative coherence that seems to ground tropological and epistemological transactions, inviting us into an experience of alterity that moves us toward new insight by problematizing false understandings.⁹

Irony disrupts cultural assumptions, consciously and subconsciously, in various ways. As Linda Hutcheon observes, irony is transideological in its politics, meaning that it can be used to challenge or uphold either radical or conservative views.¹⁰ It always has a purpose or effect: from bringing comic relief to characters and readers, to confirming or confronting the audience’s assumptions, whether those assumptions are progressive, traditional or somewhere in between.

In the scope of this essay on irony in the book of Leviticus, I will reflect on examples of the three main types of literary irony—verbal, situational and dramatic. In verbal irony, the ironist, who is either a character or the narrator, knowingly says something that comes into conflict with reality.¹¹ In this type, both the ironist and the audience agree that someone can say one thing, but mean something else, and that this is different than telling a lie.¹² Situational

7 Didier Luciani, “L’ironie vétéro-testamentaire: De Good à Sharp,” *ETL* 85 (2009): 385–410 (387).

8 Luciani, “L’ironie,” 392.

9 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 24.

10 Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, 26.

11 Joana Garmendia, *Irony*, Key Topics in Semantics and Pragmatics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 7–8.

12 Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, 17.

irony is unintended by the agents, but is “an event or occurrence that simply *happens* and that we consider ironic because of the way it occurred.”¹³ In dramatic irony, readers or the audience know the full import of a character’s actions or words, but the character is kept in the dark.¹⁴

For these forms of literary irony to work, that is, to be catchable by us as readers, Wayne Booth has suggested the irony must be marked by the ironist in a few important ways. Irony must be intended, not covert (“It is ironic that”); narrow in its application, not about life in general; and must not require the reader to decode additional ironies.¹⁵ Since deconstructionism has at least taught us that we cannot climb into the ironist’s mind, rather than calling irony “marked,” “stable” and “intended” (Booth), we might settle for “observable.”¹⁶ Semantics, however, is not the main problem we have in identifying irony in the Hebrew Bible. Rather, our problem, as Meir Sternberg explains, is that the Hebrew Bible is largely not inclined toward irony.¹⁷ Because the Hebrew Bible is concerned with divine principles—YHWH, his interactions with his people and his world—this seems to precondition readers to think that YHWH and the biblical authors are not interested in stooping down into the petty linguistic world of playing ironic tricks with readers.

This is also true when it comes to our case study of Leviticus. Why would ancient Israelite authors utilize irony in a book mainly composed of divine speeches about God’s sacred dwelling place and about holy communal life in the land? This question, however, hastily presumes that by its nature Leviticus must be free of irony. On the contrary, I will argue that observable ironies, verbal, situational and dramatic, appear in four other places in the composition of Leviticus. First, we will examine ironies that arise from the superscriptions of Leviticus 1:1 and 16:1 within the YHWH–Moses discourse at Mount Sinai. These editorial inscriptions present ironic realities within the larger context of the unfolding Moses story. Second, we will investigate the ironies of the Priestly story of the installation of the Aaronic priests for YHWH’s service (Lev 8–10). Finally, we will explore the Holiness scribes’ representation of YHWH as an ironist who by anthropomorphism shames his people toward covenant faithfulness (Lev 26).

13 Garmendia, *Irony*, 5.

14 Garmendia, *Irony*, 6.

15 Booth, *Rhetoric of Irony*, 6.

16 Douglas C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2018), 19–23; developed by Virginia Miller, *A King and A Fool? The Succession Narrative as Satire*, *BiblInt* 179 (Boston: Brill, 2019), 32–39.

17 Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 135–136.

2 Ironies in the Editorial Framework of Leviticus

YHWH's monologues through Moses, primarily for all the Israelites, extend throughout the Moses story from Israel's sojourn at Mount Sinai in the wilderness until they arrive at the desert valleys of Moab in view of the promised land (Exod 20:1/25:1—Num 36:13). The editors who have positioned these divine speeches within the larger narrative introduce them by the formulaic superscription, "Then YHWH said to Moses," and sometimes conclude by the subscription, "This is the instruction/teaching about ..."¹⁸ At times the editors of the subscriptions are so concise that they do not mention important subject matter in the preceding discourse. Other times they stress unexpected details. These exegetical maneuvers result in a dissonance with the materials they summarize.¹⁹ However, while irony is a type of dissonance between the said and unsaid, the dissonance of these subscriptions is not observably ironic.

Furthermore, the subscriptions convey many ambiguities within the larger Torah storyline. When exactly did YHWH command the people to bring their offerings to YHWH in the wilderness of Sinai (7:37–38)? Was this back when Israel was in Egypt?²⁰ Would not the "distinction between the unclean and the clean" animals (11:46) have been useful, if essential, for Noah and the readers of his story to know?²¹ Was it normal Hebrew idiom to talk of skin diseases as invading the realms of clothing and houses (14:54–57)? Did YHWH and Israelites think of washing from semen, blood, and other discharges as hygienic, or as apotropaic because these life forces have failed to bring about life (15:32–33)?²² Did YHWH want Israel to begin celebrating his appointed festivals in the wilderness (as Num 9:5), or should they wait until they could harvest crops in the land of Canaan (Lev 23:37–38)? These questions and many others point to various ambiguities, but again, while irony is a type of ambiguity, these ambiguities are not ironic *per se*.

Finally, the two colophons for the book, 26:46 and 27:34, both give the impression of concluding YHWH's revelation at Sinai, which they do not:

18 Lev 7:37–38; 11:46–47; 14:54–57; 15:32–33; 23:37–38.

19 They do not always provide what Frank Kermode would call a "satisfying consonance": *The Sense of an Ending* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 17.

20 Exod 3:12, 18; 7:16; 8:27–28.

21 Gen 7:2, 8; 8:20; cf. 15:9–11.

22 Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3 (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 1002–1004; Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 185–190.

These are the statutes and decisions and instructions that YHWH established between himself and the Israelites on Mount Sinai through Moses. (26:46)

These are the commands which YHWH commanded Moses for the Israelites on Mount Sinai. (27:34)²³

Against the impression of 26:46, YHWH continues instructing the Israelites on Mount Sinai through Moses on the matter of personal vows (27:1–33). Although one could argue 27:34 concludes the *Mount Sinai* commands, while Numbers 1:1 commences the *Sinai wilderness* instructions of Numbers 1–10,²⁴ this does not negate the fact that Leviticus 27:34 is anaphoric (אלה המצות “these are the commands”) and implies a conclusive set of divine commands.²⁵ Thus, these colophons create expectations of conclusiveness that are immediately overturned as readers only to find more instructions.²⁶ This does not mean, however, that the editors of the colophons were ironists saying one thing, but meaning another, nor were they liars.²⁷ Rather, the compositional history itself generates these thwarted expectations. In sum, the subscriptions and colophons inserted by Leviticus’ editors create dissonance, ambiguity and unrealized expectations. These rhetorical features point toward gaps in the reader’s knowledge that foster curiosity,²⁸ but are not tantamount to observable ironies. The exceptions to this arise in the expanded superscriptions of Leviticus 1:1 and 16:1, which contextualize the ensuing divine discourse within the larger unfolding Sinai narrative.

²³ Translations mine.

²⁴ See Christophe Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch: A Study in the Composition of the Book of Leviticus*, FAT 25.2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 70; see Erhard Blum, *Studien zur Komposition des Pentateuch*, BZAW 189 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 301–312.

²⁵ Otto contends that after the 27:34 colophon, Num 1:1 belongs to a post-pentateuchal redaction, assuming Exod 33:7–11 and introducing an “(in the) Sinai wilderness” (במדבר סיני) collection that expands the authoritative Mosaic revelation up until the Israelites depart from Sinai in Num 10:12: “Das Ende der Toraoffenbarung. Die Funktion der Kolophone Lev 26,46 und 27,34 sowie Num 36,13 in der Rechtshermeneutik des Pentateuch,” in *Auf dem Weg zur Endgestalt von Genesis bis 11 Regum. Festschrift Hans-Christoph Schmitt zum 65. Geburtstag*, BZAW 370 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 191–201, esp. 197.

²⁶ Even as the colophons bring closure to the Mosaic corpora, they also have the *primacy effect* of creating expectations that are then overturned by what comes next, the *recency effect* of Lev 27:1–33 and Num 1:1ff.; see James L. Resseguie, *Narrative Criticism of the New Testament: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 209.

²⁷ Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge*, 17.

²⁸ Knowledge gaps about past events create curiosity, while knowledge gaps about the future create suspense: Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 265–266.

2.1 *Leviticus 1:7*

After the exodus from Egypt, YHWH leads his people to Mount Sinai, onto which he descends in a dense cloud.²⁹ Moses enters the cloud in YHWH's presence for forty days and forty nights. During this intimate encounter, YHWH reveals the Decalogue (Exod 20:1), the Covenant Code (20:20–23:33; cf. 24:7), and then the blueprints for YHWH's meeting tent and its sancta (Exod 25–31). In the literary arrangement of Exodus, before the Israelites construct YHWH's meeting tent (Exod 35–40), Moses pitched an elusive tent outside the Israelite camp at Sinai, which he called by the same name, "the meeting tent" (אהל מועד, Exod 33:7). Apparently, any Israelite seeking YHWH could enter that tent (Exod 33:7d), but it was Moses who customarily spoke with YHWH inside that tent, "face to face, the same way a person speaks with a friend" (Exod 33:11). Moses' proximity to YHWH continues in the cleft of a rock (33:21–22), where "YHWH descended in the cloud and stood with him [Moses] there and proclaimed YHWH by name" (Exod 34:5).³⁰ But shortly thereafter, when Moses finishes constructing the meeting tent for YHWH, something strange happens:

Then the cloud covered the meeting tent, and YHWH's glory filled the dwelling place. *Moses was not able to enter the meeting tent because the cloud settled on it* and YHWH's glory filled the dwelling place.

Exod 40:34–35, trans. mine

The anaphoric article, "because *the cloud* [הענן] settled on it," makes the situational irony obvious. The same Moses who met with YHWH repeatedly *in the cloud* on the mountain, *in the cloud* in Moses' meeting tent, *in the cloud* in the cleft of the rock, is now awkwardly stuck outside the meeting tent because of that same cloud. Moses has not yet rebelled against YHWH (Num 20:12), so why is Moses forced to be distant? Is the density and pervasiveness of the cloud or divine glory itself blocking the great prophet from communing with his deity?

Turning the page to Leviticus in our modern Bibles is misleading because the Hebrew editors of Leviticus 1:1a do not express YHWH as the subject, meaning YHWH is the implied subject from Exodus 40.³¹ As we might expect, then,

29 "Dense cloud" (ענן כבד) in Exod 19:9; anaphoric "*the cloud*" (הענן), referring to the dense cloud, in 24:15–18 (4×).

30 יהוה בענן ויתיצב עמו שם ויקרא בשם יהוה (MT/SP; no Qumran evidence).

31 The "glory of YHWH" last mentions his name in Exod 40:34, but YHWH last spoke to Moses in 40:1.

the situational irony of Exodus 40 leaves its mark on Leviticus 1:1. Moses is still stuck outside the tent, forcing YHWH inside the tent to call out to Moses:

And he called out to Moses. Then YHWH spoke to Moses from the meeting tent, saying:

וַיִּקְרָא אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר

Temples in the ancient Near East functioned both as the deity's dwelling place and meeting place to commune with her or his people.³² YHWH's glory has taken up residence in his "dwelling place" (הַמִּשְׁכָּן, Exod 40:34), but as a result YHWH rendered his own "meeting place" (אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד, Lev 1:1) unfit for meeting. This awkward moment contributes to the gradual disclosure of the divine presence (Exod 24; Exod 40/Lev 1, 9, 16). Moses' exclusion indicates that the nature of the divine presence on the mountain was not the same as in the tent, necessitating the new priestly rituals of Leviticus in order to approach YHWH in his dwelling.

2.2 *Leviticus 16:1*

In the Moses story, YHWH authorizes a few individuals to *approach* him, which in Hebrew is expressed through the intransitive G-stem of קָרַב. The first time this construction is used in the Hebrew Bible is when YHWH calls to Moses from the burning bush to prohibit him: "*Do not come any closer! Take your sandals off your feet because the place where you are standing is holy ground*" (Exod 3:5). The deity's holy presence rendered the proximate ground holy, which Moses, being of the common realm, must not profane by his intrusion. This divine-Moses distance is reduced at Sinai, as we noted above, where Moses became accustomed to entering the vicinity of the divine presence in the cloud. The next divine-human occurrence of קָרַב in the G-stem comes after the exodus when Israel complains in the Sin wilderness: "Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole Israelite community, "*Come before YHWH*"³³ because he has heard your complaining" (Exod 16:9). Then the glory of YHWH appeared in a cloud to the community, followed by YHWH's provision of manna and quail (vv. 10–36). A similar sequence occurs in Leviticus 9, when "the whole

32 Michael B. Hundley, "Tabernacle or Tent of Meeting? The Dual Nature of the Sacred Tent in the Priestly Texts," in *Current Issues in Priestly and Related Literature: The Legacy of Jacob Milgrom and Beyond*, ed. Roy E. Gane and Ada Taggar-Cohen, RBS 82 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2015), 3–18.

33 קָרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה.

community approached and stood before YHWH" (9:5),³⁴ and "the glory of YHWH became visible to all the people" (9:23).³⁵

In contrast to the community, who approaches YHWH outside the meeting tent (Lev 9:5, 23), and to Moses, who only sporadically approaches YHWH inside the meeting tent (9:23), Aaron and his sons are now entering into a new season of life that will be governed by approaching YHWH's presence as they serve continually in his meeting tent.³⁶ The narrator of Exodus 40 discloses that Moses and Aaron and his sons washed their hands "whenever they approached the altar" (40:32),³⁷ but after Moses sacrifices to install Aaron and his sons (Lev 8), this custom would soon be relevant only to Aaron and his sons, who are designated to serve at the altar (Exod 30:19–20). The priests' installation in Leviticus 9 reveals this transition from Moses to Aaron: "Then Moses said to Aaron, '*Approach the altar* [קרב אליהמזבח] ... and make atonement for yourself and your house ... and make atonement for them ...' (Lev 9:7). Aaron immediately obeys, "*So Aaron approached the altar* [ויקרב אהרן אליהמזבח] ..." (9:8).

Later in the Holiness scribes' supplementary cultic laws, YHWH bans any Aaronic priest, present or future, with a physical flaw or an unclean contagion from approaching YHWH's altar (G-stem of קרב: 21:17, 18; 22:3). The implication is that Aaron and his sons, when whole and contagion-free, are to be stationed at the altar in YHWH's presence. The Priestly authors clearly regard the bronze altar for burnt offering (המזבח "the altar") and its vicinity in the meeting tent, and not just "the dwelling place" (המשכן), as the locale of YHWH's presence (לפני יהוה "before YHWH").³⁸ In Leviticus 24 (H), the Aaronic priests are also to enter the outer curtain of the tent repeatedly to tend the lamps and weekly to replenish and arrange the bread, and it is said emphatically that these activities are to be performed "before YHWH" (לפני יהוה).³⁹ While tending the lamps, Aaron is to burn a unique composition of incense "before YHWH" (לפני יהוה, Exod 30:7–8). Later the authors of Numbers 17–18 will prevent the Israelites from even approaching the meeting tent,⁴⁰ which only underscored the

34 ויקרבו בליהעדה ויעמדו לפני יהוה.

35 וירא כבוד־יהוה אליהם, using the middle voice of the N-stem of the *wayyiqtol* וירא: Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, 2nd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 50 (§3.1.2b).

36 In the only other divine-human uses of the G-stem of קרב in Leviticus, not discussed above, Aaron's nephews are summoned to come near and carry the corpses of their cousins, Nadab and Abihu, away from the dwelling place outside the camp (Lev 10:4, 5).

37 ובקרבתם אליהמזבח.

38 לפני יהוה occurs 59× in Lev 1–24.

39 In the unit of Lev 24:1–9, לפני יהוה occurs in vv. 3, 4, 6, 8.

40 Num 18:22, but also restricting access to YHWH using the G-stem of קרב, see Num 17:5; 18:3, 4.

exclusive privilege of the Levites and especially of the Aaronic priests to approach YHWH's presence.

We may summarize the above data relevant to our study as follows: YHWH intends for Aaron and his sons to approach (intransitive G-stem of קרב) YHWH's presence (לפני יהוה) at the altar and inside the outer-curtain of the dwelling place. Enter Nadab and Abihu. Whatever the reader concludes about the elusive ritual performance of Nadab and Abihu that resulted in their death (10:1–3),⁴¹ the editors of 16:1 MT/SP reduce that tragic event to a temporal clause that functions as a thematic preface for YHWH's Yom Kippur instructions to Moses:

וידבר יהוה אל-משה אחרי מות שני בני אהרן בקרבתם לפני-יהוה וימתו

YHWH spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron *when they drew near before YHWH* and died.

The dramatic irony emerges precisely because the editor has chosen to use the G-stem of קרב ("draw near") with לפני יהוה ("before YHWH"). That is, Nadab and Abihu die while drawing near before YHWH, the very action YHWH intended for Aaron and his sons to do.⁴² The 16:1 inscription intimates that the sanctuary was still contaminated by the corpses of Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10) and must be purified through the Yom Kippur ritual (Lev. 16). This enforces the irony: YHWH's priests draw near to YHWH but end up polluting his tent with their corpses (10:1–3), and their Kohathite relatives, who later would transport the most holy sancta,⁴³ must now defile themselves to transport the dead bodies (Lev 10:4–5).

Certain Rabbis tried to eliminate the irony by elevating 10:1; Numbers 3:4 and 26:61 over Leviticus 16:1: "Thus they died because of what they offered, not because of drawing near."⁴⁴ Some modern translators delete the irony by giving a negative connotation to the intransitive of קרב, which it does not have: "when

41 On its intentional elusiveness, see Gary A. Anderson, "Through Those who Are Near Me, I Will Show Myself Holy': Nadab and Abihu and Apophatic Theology," *CBQ* 77 (2015): 1–19 (18).

42 Whether Nadab and Abihu "drew near *before YHWH* [לפני יהוה]" at the bronze or incense altar, both locales were markedly in YHWH's presence (לפני יהוה "before YHWH").

43 Num 3:19, 30; 4:4–20.

44 "Sifra, *Aḥarē Mot*, §1.2," http://www.sefaria.org/Sifra_Acharei_Mot_section_1.2; cf. further possible support for the MT/SP 16:1 in other rabbinic discourse, including *Shelah*, *Korach*, *Torah Ohr*, *Rashbam*, and *HaChaim*.

they encroached,”⁴⁵ or “when they drew too close.”⁴⁶ The early translations, probably based on an alternate Hebrew text form, remove the irony by resorting to the language of Leviticus 10:1; Numbers 3:4 and 26:61: “when they offered strange fire before YHWH and died.”⁴⁷ Also, an alternative interpretation of 16:1 could obfuscate the irony: “when they drew near *and they died before YHWH*.” However, this requires one to mentally rearrange the Hebrew word order, and if the editors of 16:1 wanted to say this, they could have just duplicated the phrasing of 10:1, “and they died before YHWH” (וימתו לפני יהוה).

One could regard the irony of 16:1 in the MT as verbal, but it retells the way things happened. The irony is dramatic (not situational) because Aaron’s oldest sons are oblivious to how their story is being retold, as their corpses lie somewhere outside the Israelite camp (10:5). Finally, the dramatic irony of Leviticus 16:1 would have been felt even more forcefully in the ancient Near Eastern religious world:

With the help of the gods and through the medium of ritual, the priests ensured the perfect purity of the statue and its environs to make a suitable environment for divine manifestation and empowered or ritually activated the new statue-deity symbiosis with the divine faculties and potencies necessary to function as god on earth ... The priests had to care for the resident deity continually so that it was persuaded to remain and to remain favorably disposed to its human servants.⁴⁸

In the ancient Near East, Israel included, the priestly role of serving in proximity to the deity was paramount. Aaron and his sons repeatedly drew near to serve not a cult image hypostatically indwelt by YHWH, but aniconic spaces occupied invisibly by YHWH. Against this backdrop, the ironist of Leviticus 16:1 implies that although drawing near before YHWH in his sacred space was vital for his priests, it was also perilous. By the irony of 16:1, the editors subvert any contemporary or future priestly aristocracy. The Aaronic priests have

45 Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16*, 598.

46 NJPS.

47 The LXX, Targums, Vulgate (and possibly 11Q1, which is broken) share this reading probably based on the same, distinct Hebrew *Vorlage*, which arguably already contained a harmonization to the language of Lev 10:1; Num 3:4; 26:61: Mark A. Awabdy, “Did Nadab and Abihu Draw Near before YHWH? The Old Greek among the Witnesses of Leviticus 16:1,” *CBQ* 4 (2017): 580–593. Milgrom (*Leviticus 1–16*, 598) prefers the LXX reading at 16:1 to the MT/SP.

48 Michael B. Hundley, *Gods in Dwellings: Temples and Divine Presence in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2013), 365–366.

privilege, but not impunity in their work in the sacred zones. They must execute YHWH's ritual protocols methodically (P/H) and ethical values corporately (esp. H), or they will jeopardize YHWH's presence and blessing among his covenant people.⁴⁹

3 Irony in the Priestly Installation Story (Leviticus 8–10)

The story which 16:1 summarizes is itself a literary playground. The ritualized installation of the Aaronic priests for YHWH's sanctuary service reaches a climax in YHWH's theophany and fiery acceptance of the inaugural sacrifices (9:22–24). But the story continues. The very next foregrounded action is that of Nadab and Abihu, who offer strange fire which YHWH did not authorize, and are immediately consumed by YHWH's fire (10:1–3). Nihan has captured well four literary contrasts between chs. 8–9 and 10:1–3.⁵⁰ Here I would add that three of the narrative contrasts display a devastating reversal of choices or fates, but are not ironic. First, after the cadence of cultic obedience to YHWH's command (chs. 8–9), Aaron's oldest sons transgress the cultic boundaries of YHWH's command (10:1). Second, "the glory of YHWH" (כבוד־יהוה) is manifested to the people (9:23b), but Nadab and Abihu fail to "honor" or "glorify" (כבד N-stem) YHWH (10:3). Third, the people see YHWH's consuming fire and shout for joy (9:24), whereas Aaron sees YHWH's consuming fire and hears Moses' words and remains silent (10:3). One might claim irony in these reversals on analogy to the ironies in a satire like Jonah.⁵¹ The non-Israelite sailors fear and cry out to YHWH, while YHWH's chosen prophet, Jonah, is trying to hide from the deity for whom he speaks (Jonah 1). The difference here is that although the priests were distinctly devoted to YHWH as holy (in the Priestly theology), the people were not like the pagan sailors, but were *expected* to obey and honor YHWH (Lev 1–9).

The fourth literary contrast, however, is germane to our study. The narrator sets up a contrast between YHWH's endorsing fire and YHWH's condemning fire:

ותצא אש מלפני יהוה ותאכל עליהמוזבח את־העלה ואת־החלבים

⁴⁹ Lev 10:3; 26:11–12, but 14–39.

⁵⁰ Nihan, *Priestly Torah*, 92.

⁵¹ On Jonah as emetic parody, see Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 176–186, and as anti-prophetic satire, see David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995).

Then fire came out from YHWH's presence and ate from the altar the burnt offering and the fat pieces. (9:24a–b)

ותצא אש מלפני יהוה ותאכל אותם וימתו לפני יהוה

Then fire came out from YHWH's presence and ate them, and they died in YHWH's presence. (10:2)

This contrast conveys two dramatic ironies—dramatic because we do not get the sense that Moses or Aaron witnessed the act,⁵² and Aaron's oldest sons were incinerated before they could hear this rhetoric used against them. The first is blatant. YHWH's fire eats the sacrifices, then eats Nadab and Abihu. This irony is sharpened further by the literary context. In the prior sacrificial instructions (chs. 1–7), when the priests burn on the altar a burnt offering, and designated portions of grain offerings and of sacrifices for peace, each of these would produce “a sweet savor to YHWH” (ריח ניחח ליהוה).⁵³ The fatty portions, kidneys and lobe of the liver were even called “a food offering by fire” (להם אשה).⁵⁴ This anthropomorphic language will be further expanded by H, but before readers arrive at the priestly installation ceremony of Leviticus 8–9, they have already been accustomed to the tripartite pattern: (1) the Israelites bring their offerings for YHWH, then (2) YHWH's chosen intermediaries, Aaron and his sons, ritually offer the gifts to YHWH, who will then (3) *metaphorically* smell and ingest them. But in both Leviticus 9:24 and 10:2, metaphor gives way to reality, as YHWH's fire *eats* (אכל) the composition of the inaugural sacrifices, and then *eats* (אכל) two of his recently consecrated priests.⁵⁵

The second irony hinges on the divine expectations placed on the Aaronic priests as far back as Exodus 28–29 or even 19:6 (“kingdom of priests”). Their priestly work centered on manipulating animal blood and burning with fire.⁵⁶ They were to burn sacrifices on the bronze altar, burn lamps on the menorah, burn incense on the golden altar. Now in our story: The priests who were called to burn sacrifices in YHWH's fire were themselves burned alive by YHWH's fire. These two dramatic ironies can be subcategorized as ironies of fate or, more

52 Or Moses and post-golden-calf Aaron would have presumably tried to stop them (see Exod 32; Lev 10:3–20). This seems to be a case of the narrator's omniscience: see Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 12–13, 33–34, 46.

53 Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5; 6:8, 14; also H: 23:13, 18.

54 Lev 3:11, 16.

55 Cf. the echo in Num 16:35.

56 Throughout Exod 28–Lev 9 (and beyond), see: אש “fire,” אשה “offering by fire,” שרף “to burn,” קטר “to burn incense,” עלה “burnt offering,” with other verbs for sacrifice that imply ritual burning.

commonly, poetic justice.⁵⁷ Hereafter Nadab and Abihu will forever embody the aphorism: If you play with fire, you will get burned.⁵⁸ Aware of this Torah story, all subsequent Aaronic priests are taught to fear not only the natural fire they manipulate daily in restricted areas, but supernatural fire which could burn them alive anywhere, any time.

4 YHWH the Ironist in H: The Power of Anthropomorphic Shaming

There are several different Priestly literary soils in which ironies theoretically could have germinated: in P/H against preceding non-P(JE) texts in Genesis–Exodus; in the Holiness (Lev 17–26) expansion on or revision of P (Lev 1–16); and in P/H against conventional ancient Near Eastern thought and practice. One might expect to find ironies in H, since H presupposes P but cannot always be reconciled to P without flattening their unique voices.⁵⁹ Such discrepancies, however, are not ironic of themselves. Moreover, the Holiness scribes give no indication that they are presenting YHWH's words as "an unreliable 'said'" that points to "a truer 'unsaid' so as to persuade us of something that is subtler, more complex, or more profound than the apparent meaning."⁶⁰ Rather, the divine speeches of H are regarded as YHWH's own words and, therefore, are to be taken *prima facie*. As a result, the Holiness divine instructions are not inclined toward irony, but they do frequently use rhetorical devices which can be mistaken as irony: paradox, euphemism, *lex talionis* and most anthropomorphisms.

Paradox, or antinomy, is apparent in H. How, for example, can YHWH's priests, sacrifices and meeting place be holy, that is belong in a special way to YHWH in distinction from the community at large (Lev 1–10),⁶¹ and yet

57 Sharpe, *Irony in the Drama*, 42.

58 The principle resembles *lex talionis* (Exod 21:23–25; Lev 24:19–20). Does H's *lex talionis* law intend to create irony? That is, by the ritual act of killing the killer or maiming the same anatomical part that the perpetrator took, does the perpetrator embody a situational irony as a didactic tool to deter further acts of disobedience in the community? The answer must be negative, since the perpetrator's *talion* (punishment) is anticipated, whereas irony requires an element of surprise (Luciani, "L'ironie," 392).

59 See, i.e., Christophe Nihan, "Israel's Festival Calendars in Leviticus 23, Numbers 28–29, and the Formation of 'Priestly' Literature," in *The Books of Leviticus and Numbers*, ed. Thomas Römer, BETL 215 (Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 177–232.

60 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 24.

61 Following the definition of holy by David J. A. Clines, "Alleged Basic Meanings of the Hebrew Verb *Qdš* 'Be Holy': An Exercise in Comparative Hebrew Lexicography," VT 71 (2021): 481–502.

at the same time the whole Israelite community must be holy to YHWH as YHWH is holy (19:2)?⁶² Is the *sine qua non* of Israel's religion performing cultic rituals and distinguishing clean and unclean realms (Lev 1–16, 27), or is it observing social ethics and festivals and redeeming the land and those living in it (Lev 18–26)? Said another way, how can YHWH's relationship with Israel be governed by the priestly cult (Lev 1–10, 16) and by the covenant with its promise of blessings and curses (Lev 17/18–26)?⁶³ Such paradoxes are perplexing, but hardly ironic. H also uses certain euphemisms for sexual intercourse, such as 'to uncover the nakedness' (ערוּת + גִּלָּה*),⁶⁴ 'to lie' (שָׁכַב*),⁶⁵ and 'to give your/his copulation' (נָתַן + שָׁכַבְתָּ/ו*).⁶⁶ These metonymic phrases are not ironic, however. Anthropomorphisms, sparse in P, become more frequent in H. In P, YHWH smells burnt, grain, and fellowship offerings as "a sweet savor to YHWH" (רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה)⁶⁷ and calls these "a food offering by fire" (לֶחֶם אֵשֶׁה).⁶⁸ In H, YHWH appears to make this even more pronounced by calling such sacrifices "the food of their/your/his/your God" (לֶחֶם אֱלֹהֵיהֶם/וְכֶם).⁶⁹ Also in H, the land of Canaan polluted by sin and contagions is like a person suffering from food poisoning and will "vomit out" (קִיא*) the Israelites, just as it vomited out past residents who poisoned the land (18:25, 28; cf. 20:22).⁷⁰ The image of a vomiting land, while not ironic *per se*, denounces Canaan's inhabitants and threatens Israel in a humiliating satirical attack.⁷¹

There is, however, at least one anthropomorphism in H that drips with situational irony:

אִז תִּרְעַה הָאָרֶץ אֶת־שִׁבְתֶּיהָ כֹּל יְמֵי הַשָּׁמָה וְאַתֶּם בָּאָרֶץ אֵיכֶם אִז תִּשְׁבֹּת הָאָרֶץ
וְהָרִיעָת אֶת־שִׁבְתֶּיהָ:
כִּלְיֵי הַשָּׁמָה תִּשְׁבֹּת אֶת אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שִׁבְתָּה בְּשִׁבְתֶּיכֶם בְּשִׁבְתֶּכֶם עָלֶיהָ:

62 See Knohl, *Sanctuary of Silence*, 152–157, 180–186, 189–192.

63 See Eckart Otto, "Forschungen zur Priesterschrift," *TRu* 62 (1997): 1–50 (46–47).

64 Lev 18 (11x); 20:19.

65 Lev 20:11, 12, 13, 18.

66 Lev 18:20, 23; 20:15; Num 5:20. See "שָׁכַבְתָּ," *HALOT* 4:1487.

67 Lev 1:9, 13, 17; 2:2, 9; 3:5; 6:8, 14; also H: 23:13, 18.

68 Lev 3:11, 16.

69 Lev 21:6, 8, 17, 21, 22; 22:25; cf. "my food/bread" (לֶחֶמִי) in Num 28:2.

70 Lev 18:25, 28 (2x); 20:22.

71 On satire as such, see Miller, *A King and a Fool?*, 26. See Jonathan Klawans for later rabbinic interpretation of the vomiting-out motif: *Impurity and Sin in Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119–120; *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 55.

Then *the land will enjoy its sabbath years* all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then *the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths*. As long as it lies desolate, *it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it*.

Lev 26:34–35 NRSV, also v. 43

In its context, 26:34–35 contains a double wordplay which produces the irony. First, YHWH had repeatedly commanded Israel, “My sabbaths you must keep” (את־שַׁבְּתֵי תִשְׁמְרוּ, 26:2a),⁷² but in this scenario Israel failed to obey, resulting in this divine curse (26:27). By contrast, YHWH never commanded the Land to keep his sabbaths, but the Land, now personified as a moral agent, loyally keeps covenant and rests on YHWH’s sabbaths.⁷³ For the Priestly and Holiness writers, to *rest* (שָׁבַת) on the Sabbath was not passively to take a break, doze off, or fall asleep, but to act as an obedient moral agent by abstaining from performing “any business work” (כָּל־מְלָאכָה). Ironically, because the profaning Israelites are in exile estranged from the Land, the Land is finally free to obey to YHWH.⁷⁴ Second, playing with two homonyms, YHWH announces that while exilic Israel “*makes amends* for their iniquity” (רָצָה II, 26:41), the uninhabited Land emphatically “*will enjoy its sabbaths*” (רָצָה I, twice in 26:34). The Land’s joy is represented as a complex human emotion, which storytellers would normally reserve for full characters.⁷⁵

Israel endures pain, while the Land experiences pleasure. Although these two wordplays are in YHWH’s voice, the irony is situational rather than verbal insofar as YHWH imagines a situation that, with Israel’s full knowledge, unfolds in an ironic reversal of fates. The poetic justice, as we saw with Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10, both stings and satisfies. The chosen people violate the Land, and YHWH banishes them so that his faithful Land can finally enjoy a span of sabbath rest (26:34–35, 43). By obedience and joy, the loyal Land puts the Land-abusing covenant community to shame. In another sense, the guilty people are supplanted by the innocent Land who joyfully obeys YHWH’s *tôrâ*. One could imagine the happy and rested Land singing, “How I

72 The verbal object is fronted object for emphasis (also Lev 19:3, 30; 23:38); see Christo H. J. van der Merwe, Jacobus A. Naudé, and Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed. (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 501 (§47.2.1.1ba).

73 Paavo N. Tucker argues for an H composition from Gen 1:1–2:3 through Lev 26:34–45, so that “observing the Sabbath as an expression of repentance and commitment to holiness as the epitome of the Torah will enable Israel’s restoration from exile”: *The Holiness Composition in the Book of Exodus* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 51.

74 Similarly, Jonah disobeys YHWH and is thrown off the boat to face death, while the pagan sailors cry out in dependence on YHWH and are saved (Jonah 1).

75 Adele Berlin, “Characterization in Biblical Narrative: David’s Wives,” *JSTOT* 23 (1982): 69–85.

love your instruction!" (Ps 119:97a),⁷⁶ while exiled Israel refuses to sing, "How can we sing YHWH's song in a foreign land" (Ps 137:4).⁷⁷ Through the anthropomorphic sting of Leviticus 26:34–35, the Land shames YHWH's covenant people by subverting Israel's claim to worth and status.⁷⁸ Honor and shame are always adjudged in the eyes of some public court of opinion, and here the court is YHWH who, by announcing these covenant curses as a future verdict, evaluates Israel's shameful condition. The intent of this shaming device was to provoke Israel to repent and take back its honor from the Land who had taken it legitimately from Israel (26:40–45, esp. 43).

5 Conclusion

The task of identifying irony in Leviticus should be constrained by one's methodology, and in this chapter I have taken a minimalist approach. In Leviticus' editorial framework, for example, I have cautioned against confusing dissonance, ambiguity and overturned expectations with observable irony. Leviticus 1:1 and 16:1 offer exceptions to the rule. At the onset of Leviticus, the great prophet of YHWH cannot enter a meeting place designed for meeting with YHWH (1:1). The oldest sons of Aaron die for drawing near to YHWH, the very action Aaronic priests were called to perform continually (16:1). Moreover, in the Nadab and Abihu episode, one should not reduce the reversals of human choice and fate to irony, but in the Hebrew idiom it is dramatically ironic that YHWH's fire eats two of YHWH's five priests (10:2). We have also surveyed YHWH's own discourse in the Holiness collection, Leviticus 17–26, but there again have warned against mislabeling paradoxes, euphemisms and many anthropomorphisms, as irony. Nonetheless, at least one anthropomorphism qualifies as situational irony, namely, that the personified Land will one day joyfully keep YHWH's sabbaths, because Israel, now estranged from the Land, failed to do so (26:34–45, 43). As a whole, Leviticus is primarily controlled by literary features that are not ironic. Occasionally, however, this book's editors, storytellers and the Holiness scribes who convey YHWH's words shrewdly play the irony card in their hand to reform the theology and ethics of the covenant community.

⁷⁶ מִה־אַהֲבַתִּי תוֹרָתְךָ (transl. mine above).

⁷⁷ אֵיךְ נִשְׁרֵי אֶת־שִׁיר־יְהוָה עַל אֲדָמַת נֹכַר (transl. mine above).

⁷⁸ See Bruce J. Malina, "Honor and Shame: Pivotal Values of the First-Century Mediterranean World," in *The New Testament World: Insights from Cultural Anthropology*, rev. ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 28–62 (52).

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Die Ironie des Deuteronomiums

Benjamin Kilchör

In seiner engsten und klarsten Definition meint Ironie „eine *Redeweise*, bei der das Gegenteil des eigtl. Wortlauts gemeint ist.“¹ In diesem Sinne gibt es im Deuteronomium keine Ironie. Dies ist wenig überraschend, besteht das Deuteronomium doch mehrheitlich aus Gesetzen und Anweisungen, wofür eine Redeweise, die das Gegenteil der eigentlichen Intention formuliert, denkbar ungeeignet ist. Am ehesten könnte man Ironie in diesem Sinne allenfalls im Geschichtsrückblick des Mose (Dtn 1–3) erwarten. Doch kann Ironie auch „satzübergreifend und sogar textkonstitutiv sein, das Gemeinte ergibt sich in diesem Fall erst im Textzusammenhang und kann nicht mit dem ‚Gegenteil‘ einer einzelnen Äußerung identifiziert werden.“² Neben diese übergreifende, aber dennoch durch ein kommunizierendes Subjekt intendierte Ironie tritt zudem die sogenannte „objektive Ironie“, die nicht eine ironische Intention eines kommunizierenden Subjektes voraussetzt, sondern in Objekten angelegt ist, die kein Bewusstsein haben.³ Man spricht dann beispielsweise von der „Ironie des Schicksals“, oder der „Ironie der Geschichte“.⁴ Objektive Ironie setzt einen Zuschauer (Ironiker) voraus, der die Ironie der Situation bemerkt, die sich aus dem Widerspruch zwischen der Erwartung und der eintretenden Wirklichkeit ergibt, indem letztlich das Gegenteil des Erwarteten eintritt.

1 Helmut Weidhase, „Ironie,“ in *Metzler Literatur Lexikon. Begriffe und Definitionen*, ed. Günther Schweikle and Irmgard Schweikle (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1990), 224.

2 Hadumod Bußmann, *Lexikon der Sprachwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 2002), 320.

3 Zur objektiven Ironie siehe Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2021), 52–59.

4 Von „Ironie des Schicksals“ oder „Ironie der Geschichte“ spricht man, wenn zwischen dem, was allgemein erwartet wird und dem, was effektiv eintritt, ein Widerspruch besteht, der durch ein beobachtendes Subjekt bemerkt wird. In den meisten Fällen handelt es sich dabei um eine „tragische Ironie“: Indem ein Protagonist versucht, ein bestimmtes Ereignis abzuwenden, führt er es unabsichtlich gerade herbei (das bekannteste Beispiel dafür dürfte Sophokles' *König Ödipus* sein). Wilhelm Radtke definiert die Ironie des Schicksals dahingehend, dass „ein glückverheißendes Geschehnis in Wirklichkeit Unheil bringt (gleichsam ein Kontrast zwischen Äußerung und Handeln des Schicksals)“, siehe Wilhelm Radtke, *Ironie und Humor in John Galsworthys Forsythe-Zyklus*. (Lengerich: Lengericher Handelsdruckerei, 1938), 70.

Da in biblischer Geschichte das Schicksal, bzw. die Geschichte nicht einfach dem bewussten Zufall zugeschrieben wird, sondern das Walten Gottes den Lauf der Geschichte lenkt, ist es nicht möglich, scharf zwischen einer subjektiven Ironie (deren Subjekt dann letztlich Gott wäre) und einer objektiven Ironie zu unterscheiden. Dies mag das Beispiel von Esau und Jakob veranschaulichen: Über dem Verhältnis von Jakob und Esau steht das göttliche Orakel, dass der Ältere dem Jüngeren dienen wird (Gen 25,23). Doch alles, was Jakob tut, um dieses Orakel zur Erfüllung zu bringen, führt zum Gegenteil, so dass er schließlich vor Esau fliehen und seinem Onkel Laban zwanzig Jahre lang dienen muss. Erst, als er seinem älteren Bruder Esau als Knecht begegnet, sich siebenmal vor ihm verneigt (Gen 33,3) und ihn als seinen Herrn anspricht (Gen 33,8), wendet sich das Blatt.⁵ Es ist die Ironie der Geschichte, dass Jakob das Verheißene nur erlangt, indem er das Gegenteil dessen tut, was verheißend ist. Doch hinter dieser Ironie steht Gott, der Jakob das Verheißene eben auf diese Weise zueignen möchte. Da Gott aber nicht auf derselben Ebene handelt wie die menschlichen Protagonisten der Geschichte, würde ich bei der Terminologie der „objektiven Ironie“ bleiben.

Der Titel dieses Beitrags spricht nicht von „Ironie im Deuteronomium“, als ob das Deuteronomium Ironie hier und da als Stilmittel gebrauchen würde, sondern von der „Ironie des Deuteronomiums“. Diese Ironie besteht darin, dass das Deuteronomium weder für sich genommen noch als Abschluss des Pentateuchs den „erwarteten“ Abschluss findet: Der Bogen von der Landverheißung im Buch Genesis zur Landnahme wird nicht abgeschlossen, das Deuteronomium und mit ihm der gesamte Pentateuch endet nicht mit der Durchquerung des Jordans, sondern mit dem Tod des Mose.

Die Feststellung, dass die Verheißung im Pentateuch nicht zur Erfüllung gelangt, hat bekanntlich zu Theorien geführt, die davon ausgehen, dass der Pentateuch sekundär vom Josuabuch (*Hexateuch*) bzw. von den Vorderen Propheten (*Enneateuch*) abgetrennt wurde. Doch diese Frage soll nicht Gegenstand des vorliegenden Beitrags sein.⁶ Die Unterscheidung von Pentateuch und Vorderen Propheten hat sich in allen Gestalten des jüdischen und christlichen Kanons durchgesetzt und so soll diese vorliegende Gestalt des Pentateuchs Ausgangspunkt sein, um der „Ironie des Deuteronomiums“ nachzuspüren.

5 Siehe dazu besonders Jan P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art in Genesis. Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 197–231.

6 Zur neueren Diskussion zur Hexateuchhypothese siehe Thomas Römer, „Der Pentateuch,“ in *Die Entstehung des Alten Testaments*, ed. Walter Dietrich, Hans-Peter Mathys, Thomas Römer, and Rudolf Smend (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2014), 53–166 (73–77). Zur Enneateuchhypothese siehe Cees Houtman, *Der Pentateuch. Die Geschichte seiner Erforschung neben einer Auswertung* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994), 441–446.

Die beiden vielleicht grundlegendsten Studien zur narrativen Logik des synchron gelesenen Deuteronomiums sind Robert Polzins *Moses and the Deuteronomist* (1980) und Jean-Pierre Sonnets *The Book within the Book* (1997). Bei beiden ist die Frage nach Ironie im Deuteronomium kein Gegenstand der Untersuchung und so arbeiten sie auch nicht mit einer expliziten Theorie der Ironie. Beide sprechen aber punktuell von Ironie im Zusammenhang damit, dass es für ihr Verständnis des Deuteronomiums als Abschiedsrede eine zentrale Rolle spielt, dass Mose nicht in das verheißene Land darf, sondern an dessen Grenze stirbt. Die zentrale Rolle dieses Schlusses, gerade auch für die Rechtshermeneutik des Deuteronomiums, hat zuletzt eine starke Betonung und vertiefte Deutung im großen Deuteronomiumkommentar von Eckart Otto erfahren, dessen Schlussabschnitt die Überschrift „Moses Tod als die Geburtsstunde der Tora“ trägt.⁷

Einige Schlüsselmomente, die zu dieser „Ironie des Deuteronomiums“ beitragen, sollen im Folgenden besprochen werden.

1 Deuteronomium 1–4

Dtn 1–4 spannt den Bogen der Wüstenwanderung Israels vom Horeb bis zu Israels Versammlung jenseits des Jordans im Lande Moab. Mose eröffnet seine Rede mit der Erinnerung daran, wie Gott Israel aufgefordert hatte, den Horeb zu verlassen, wo sie lange genug gewesen waren (1,6). Das verheißene Land rückt in den Blick, das Gott nun „vor euren Augen dahingegeben hat“, es einzunehmen, um die Verheißung, die Gott den Vätern Abraham, Isaak und Jakob gegeben hat, zur Erfüllung zu bringen (1,8).⁸

Die Horeb-Generation soll aber wegen ihres Unglaubens keinen Anteil an dieser Erfüllung haben (Dtn 1,35). Ausnahmen sind die beiden Kundschafter Kaleb (1,36) und Josua (1,38), die bei der Auskundschaftung des Landes als einzige den Glauben nicht verloren haben. Mose dagegen wird zur ungläubigen Generation gerechnet (1,37): „Auch gegen mich wurde JHWH zornig um

⁷ Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 23,16–34,12* (Freiburg: Herder, 2017), 2261–2286.

⁸ Zur Bedeutung von Dtn 1,8 für das „Sinngefüge des jetzigen Deuteronomiums“ siehe Norbert Lohfink, *Die Väter Israels im Deuteronomium* (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 27. Zur Bedeutung von Dtn 1,6–8 innerhalb von Dtn 1–3 siehe Bill T. Arnold „Reexamining the ‘Fathers’ in Deuteronomy’s Framework,” in *Torah and Tradition. Papers Read at the Sixteenth Joint Meeting of the Society for Old Testament Study and the Oudtestamentisch Werkgezelschap, Edinburgh 2015*, ed. Klaas Spronk and Hans Barstad (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 10–41 (33–38).

euretwillen⁹ und sprach: Auch du sollst nicht dort hinkommen.“ An Moses Stelle tritt Josua, der Israel das Land als Erbe verteilen soll. Mose soll ihm den Mut stärken (1,38). Es folgt in Dtn 1,40–46 die Erinnerung an die Geschichte aus Num 14,39–45, wo das Volk nach dem Gerichtswort Gottes über den Unglauben aufgrund des Berichtes der Kundschafter dann doch eigenmächtig gegen die Amoriter kämpfen will und eine vernichtende Niederlage einfängt. J. Gordon McConville weist auf die darin enthaltene Ironie hin:

The sense of irony and parody is now heightened by the people's belated attempt to go into the land (the account parallels Num. 14:39–45). Formally, the intention expressed in v. 41 looks entirely right. There is a confession of sin (the only one in Deuteronomy), and a resolution to 'go up' and fight in obedience to God's command. It is made clear, however, that this confession has no effect (cf. Jer. 3:22b–24), and that the new resolve does not come from obedience to God. (The point is stronger than in Numbers, for the prohibition that follows, reversing the original command [42], comes directly from God, rather than from Moses [cf. Num. 14:41–42].)¹⁰

In Dtn 3,25 schließlich bittet Mose darum, doch den Jordan durchqueren und das verheißene Land sehen zu dürfen, doch lehnt Gott seine Bitte ab: „Genug! Fahre nicht fort, mit mir noch über diese Sache zu reden!“ (Dtn 3,26). Mose scheitert also mit seiner Fürbitte für sich selbst (anders als mit seiner Fürbitte für das Volk in Dtn 9,25–29). Wieder wird ihm Josua als Nachfolger gegenübergestellt: „Beauftrage Josua und festige und stärke ihn! Denn er soll vor diesem Volk her hinübergehen und er soll ihnen das Land, das du siehst, als Erbe aus teilen“ (Dtn 3,28). Jean-Pierre Sonnet kommentiert:

The irony is that he is now entrusted not only with the animating of Joshua (as in 1:38, „encourage him“), but also with the formal appointing of Joshua as the alternative leader: „Commission Joshua (וַיִּצַו אֶת יְהוֹשֻׁעַ)“ (3:28). In giving a detailed account of the affair, Moses thus leaves no doubt: his act of communication is a valedictory speech, in the full sense of the word. He has to impart to the audience a sense of momentum

9 Das „um euretwillen“ ist nur als Rückbezug auf Num 20 verständlich und setzt damit einen pentateuchischen Erzählszusammenhang voraus, der über das Deuteronomium hinausreicht; so auch J. Gordon McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic; Nottingham: Apollos, 2002), 71; Otto Eckart, *Deuteronomium 1,1–4,43* (Freiburg: Herder, 2012), 503.

10 McConville, *Deuteronomy*, 72.

toward a land he will not reach; he has to prepare the people for a future he will not share.¹¹

Sonnet sieht die Ironie des Deuteronomium-Schlusses hier darin vorweggenommen, dass Moses Bitte um Einlass in das verheißene Land nicht nur abgelehnt wird, sondern dass Mose umgehend seinen Nachfolger bevollmächtigen und ermutigen soll.¹²

Eine gewisse Zuspitzung findet sich schließlich in Dtn 4,21–22, wo Mose nochmals daran erinnert, dass Gott über ihn „um eures Tuns/eurer Sache willen“ (על דבריכם) erzürnt war und dass er darum hier sterben muss und nicht den Jordan durchqueren darf: „Ihr aber werdet durchqueren und dieses gute Land erben.“ Die Rollen sind vertauscht, Mose kann wegen des Volkes nicht in das Land, das Volk hingegen wird dank der Führung des Mose den Jordan durchqueren und das Land in Besitz nehmen können.

2 Deuteronomium 31–34

In Dtn 31,1–8 kommt Mose zunächst noch einmal darauf zu sprechen, dass er nicht den Jordan durchqueren darf (31,2), dass aber JHWH selbst vor Israel her den Jordan durchqueren wird (31,3a) und ebenso Josua (31,3b). Anschließend setzt er Josua vor den Augen des Volkes in sein Amt ein und betont nochmals, dass Josua das Volk nach der Väterverheißung ins Land bringen wird (31,7) und dass JHWH selbst vorangeht (31,8).

Nach dem Lied des Mose fordert Gott schließlich Mose auf, den Berg Nebo zu besteigen, um das Land Kanaan wenigstens zu sehen, bevor er da sterben wird. Zwar darf er das Land sehen, aber nicht hineingehen (Dtn 32,48–52), was sich dann im Tod des Mose in Dtn 34,1–5 wörtlich erfüllt. Hierin sieht Robert Polzin die „final compositional irony of the book,“ da der Erzähler das Grundmuster von berichtetem Wort Gottes und Bericht der wörtlichen Erfüllung gegen Mose selbst verwende:

32:48–52 consists of the narrator's report in direct discourse of God's decision to have Moses die in Moab as punishment for his sin in the wilderness of Zin. It is an advance in explicitness concerning *why* God was angry with Moses (cf. earlier 1:37; 3:36; and 4:21–22):

11 Jean-Pierre Sonnet, *The Book within the Book. Writing in Deuteronomy* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 33.

12 Zur Verbindung von Dtn 3,27–28 mit Dtn 31–34 siehe die tabellarische Übersicht bei Dominik Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), 128.

„... because you broke faith with me in the midst of the people
... because you did not revere me as holy in the midst of Israel.“
(32:51)

Then in 34:5 the narrator reports the death of Moses in Moab „according to the word of the LORD.“¹³

In Polzins Deutung ist der Erzähler (Deuteronomist) das Subjekt dieser „compositional irony“. Ihm zufolge möchte der Deuteronomist sich selber als Prophet wie Mose darstellen, indem er letztlich Mose zwar lobt, aber auf subtile Weise dessen Einzigartigkeit untergräbt und sich damit selbst in Szene setzt.¹⁴ Die Ironie wäre dann nicht als „objektive Ironie“ zu bezeichnen, sondern als durch den Erzähler als Subjekt eingesetzte Ironie, die durch ein Lob letztlich die Position von Mose zu unterminieren versucht. Es ist allerdings fraglich, ob sich Dtn 34,5 wirklich als intendierte ironische Bezugnahme auf Dtn 32:51 plausibel machen lässt. Doch muss man dieser Deutung der Erzählstimme nicht folgen, um die Ironie der Geschichte im Sinne einer objektiven Ironie wahrzunehmen, die Mose kein siegreiches Ende mit Landeroberung gewährt, sondern ihn an der Schwelle zu dem Ziel, für das er sich mit seiner ganzen Existenz eingesetzt hat, sterben lässt.

3 Deuteronomium 32,49: Der Berg „Abarim“

Ein Schlüsselwort im Erzählrahmen des Deuteronomiums ist עבר („durchqueren“). Es steht für die Durchquerung des Jordans (עבר את הירדן, „den Jordan durchqueren“) und damit für den Einzug in das verheißene Land (עבר שמה, „dort hinübergehen“). In den bereits genannten Textstellen bittet Mose in Dtn 3,25, ins Land jenseits des Jordans „hinübergehen“ zu dürfen, doch an seiner Stelle soll Josua „hinübergehen“ (3,28). Mose erinnert daran, wie Gott geschworen hat, dass er nicht den Jordan „durchqueren“ dürfe (4,21) und so wird er nicht „hinübergehen“ (4,22a), doch wird das Volk „hinübergehen“ (4,22b). Auch in 31,2–3 wird das Verb עבר dreimal verwendet. Das letzte Vorkommen ist Dtn 34,4. Der Vers endet mit dem Satz ושמא לא תעבר: „Und dorthin wirst du nicht hinübergehen.“¹⁵

13 Robert Polzin, *Moses and the Deuteronomist. A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 71–72.

14 Polzin, *Moses*, 34.

15 Sonnet, *Book*, 222, listet für עבר את הירדן Dtn 2,22; 3,27; 4,21.22.26; 9,1; 11,31; 12,10; 27,2.4.12; 30,18; 31,2; 31,13; 32,47 und für עבר שמה Dtn 3,21; 4,14; 6,1; 11,8.11; 34,4 auf.

Dtn 32,49 bezeichnet den Berg Nebo als הַר הָעֵבְרִים, „Berg der Überquerungen“, von Samuel R. Driver als „the mountain ,of the parts beyond“ übersetzt.¹⁶ Jean-Pierre Sonnet sieht in diesem einzigartigen Toponym eine „subtle irony“, da Gott gegenüber Mose den Berg, auf dem Mose sterben wird, als „Berg der Überquerungen“ bezeichnet.¹⁷ Er verweist zudem auf Dtn 29,11, wo sich die an Israel gerichtete Formulierung „damit du durchquerst (לְעֵבְרָךְ) in den Bund JHWHs, deines Gottes“ findet, auch im Zusammenhang mit dem Rückverweis auf Abraham, Isaak und Jakob.¹⁸

4 Deuteronomium 28,68: Umkehrung der Landnahme

Die Flüche in Dtn 28,15–68 für Bundesbruch enden mit einem Fluch, der die Landnahme umkehrt:

Zurückbringen wird dich JHWH nach Ägypten auf Schiffen, auf dem Weg, wovon ich zu dir gesagt habe: „Du sollst ihn nicht wiedersehen“, und ihr werdet euch dort euren Feinden als Sklaven und Sklavinnen zum Kauf anbieten, und niemand wird euch kaufen.

Diese Passage spielt möglicherweise auf Ex 13,17–18 an,¹⁹ wo Gott das Volk einen Umweg durch das Schilfmeer führt. Laut diesem Fluch werden sie auf dem gleichen Weg wieder nach Ägypten zurückgeführt (vgl. Dtn 1,40). Doch wo braucht Israel denn auf diesem Weg Schiffe? Doch wohl beim Schilfmeer, sofern kein Mose dabei ist, der mit der Kraft Gottes die Wasser des Meeres

16 Samuel R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 383.

17 Sonnet, *Book*, 222–223.

18 Sonnet, *Book*, 223.

19 „אשר אמרתי לך“ („worüber ich dir gesagt habe“) ist ein deutlicher Rückverweis. Die darauf folgende Wendung „לֹא תִסִּיף עוֹד לִרְאוֹתָהּ“ („du sollst ihn nicht wiedersehen“) findet sich allerdings an keiner früheren Stelle im Pentateuch. Das Objekt des Satzes „du sollst ihn nicht wiedersehen“ ist der „Weg“ (דֶּרֶךְ). Von allen pentateuchischen Passagen, die das Verb „sehen“ (רָאָה) mit einem Weg verbinden (Gen 6,12; 38,14; Ex 13,17; 33,13; Num 22,23.31; Dtn 1,19.31.33; 9,16; 22,4), passt nur Ex 13,17 als möglicher Bezugstext, wo Gott das Volk Israel nicht den „Weg des Philisterlandes“ (דֶּרֶךְ אֶרֶץ פְּלִשְׁתִּים) führt, damit es das Volk nicht reut, „wenn sie Kampf sehen“ (בְּרִיתָם מִלְחָמָה), so dass sie dann „nach Ägypten zurückkehren“ (וְהָשִׁיבָךְ יְהוָה מִצְרַיִם), vgl. in Dtn 28,68 die Formulierung „וְהָשִׁיבָךְ יְהוָה מִצְרַיִם“. Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 273, weist als Referenztext für „לֹא תִסִּיף עוֹד לִרְאוֹתָהּ“ zudem auf Ex 14,13 hin (לֹא תִסִּיפוּ לִרְאוֹתָם עוֹד עֵד) mit den Ägyptern als Objekt.

teilen kann! Mehr noch: Wenn sie dann in Ägypten ankommen, werden die Ägypter sie nicht einmal als Sklaven wollen! Wenn es im engeren Sinne Ironie im Deuteronomium gibt, dann wohl hier: Aus Sicht des Exodus wären Schiffe am Schilfmeer ja ein Luxus gewesen und alle Probleme wären gelöst gewesen, wenn die Ägypter die Israeliten nicht als Sklaven gewollt hätten. Doch was beim Auszug aus Ägypten ein Segen gewesen wäre, kehrt sich in diesem Fluch ins Gegenteil, weil sich die Marschrichtung umkehrt. Die Ironie besteht darin, dass alle Elemente sich ins Gegenteil verkehren: Wo Israel für den Weg von der Sklaverei in die Freiheit ohne Schiffe das Meer durchqueren musste, wird es auf dem umgekehrten Weg in die Versklavung den Luxus von Schiffen haben; wo Ägypten auf die Sklaven aus Israel nicht verzichten wollte, wird es sie nun abweisen; und mehr als alles: Wo JHWH gesagt hat, dass Israel diesen Weg nicht mehr sehen soll, macht Israel sich freiwillig auf diesen Weg. Israel will also wieder in die Sklaverei nach Ägypten zurück und JHWH führt sie sogar auf Schiffen dahin, doch die Ägypter wollen diese Sklaven nicht mehr haben. Dieser Fluch kommt im Erzählsammenhang aus dem Mund von Mose, die Ironie ist nicht eine „Ironie der Geschichte“ und somit keine objektive Ironie, sondern sie ist eine durch Mose als Stilmittel eingesetzte Ironie, die den ausgesprochenen Fluch mit bissigem Spott verbindet, der darauf abzielt, dass Israel durch die Führung JHWHs, der den Fluch umsetzt, tiefer fallen wird als in der Zeit der Sklaverei in Ägypten.

Darüber hinaus kann man diesen Fluch vielleicht auch zu Mose in Bezug setzen, der „um eurentwillen“ nicht den Jordan durchqueren darf, während das Volk ihn durchqueren und das Land erben darf. Mose trifft in einem gewissen Sinne stellvertretend das Gericht, das eigentlich das ganze Volk treffen müsste: Er verliert seinen Landanteil, er stirbt vor der Erfüllung der Väterverheißung. Anders als die Erzeltern ist er nicht einmal im verheißenen Land begraben. An Mose zeigt sich damit exemplarisch, was auch das ganze Volk treffen wird, wenn der Bund gebrochen wird. Zwar durften sie den Jordan durchqueren, doch sie werden ihn wieder in die Gegenrichtung durchqueren müssen, wenn der Fluch aus Dtn 28,68 eintrifft. Nicht nur für das Schilfmeer, sondern auch für den Jordan werden sie dann Boote brauchen.

Matthieu Pageau, der Bund und Bundesbruch mit Segen und Fluch in Dtn 28 in kosmischen Dimensionen deutet als Bund zwischen Himmel und Erde, kommentiert Dtn 28,68 folgendermaßen:

The passage ... clearly illustrates the pattern of cyclical time as one of contradiction, absurdity, vanity, and irony. First, the threat of “returning to Egypt” represents a return to more primitive conditions for this nation. It is therefore analogous to the flood at the cosmic scale.

Moreover, God is basically saying, “Do not make me contradict myself because I will.” Indeed, when there is a clear covenant between heaven and earth, God will remain true and consistent, but if that agreement becomes muddled in the flow of time, then God will have no qualms about contradicting himself.²⁰

Die Aussage „Du sollst ihn [= den Weg] nicht wiedersehen,“ die im Textzusammenhang von Mose stammt, wird von Pageau Gott zugeschrieben, was zutrifft, wenn wirklich Ex 13,17–18 im Hintergrund steht (im Erzählzusammenhang stammt der Fluch, wie oben bemerkt, aus Moses Mund). Der Fluch besteht dann letztlich in der Tat darin, dass die kosmische Ordnung aus den Fugen gerät, weil der Bund zwischen Himmel und Erde gebrochen ist, so dass Gott dem Volk Israel widersprüchlich wird.

5 Ironie und die Verschriftung der Tora

Sowohl Robert Polzin wie auch Jean-Pierre Sonnet stellen in ihren synchronen Auslegungen des Deuteronomiums Mose und den Erzähler einander gegenüber. Dieser Gegenüberstellung entspricht insbesondere bei Sonnet auch die Gegenüberstellung von mündlicher zu schriftlicher Tora. In dieser Logik konkurrieren letztlich Mose und die verschriftete Tora in ihrer Autorität als Vermittler des Gotteswillens. Eckart Otto formuliert prägnant: „Mose muss sterben, damit die Tora leben kann.“²¹ Für Sonnet liegt hierin die Pointe des Deuteronomiums und er sieht darin auch die eigentliche Ironie, wenn er mit Blick auf Dtn 30,10 und 31,26 schreibt:

The reader makes his acquaintance with the Torah *as spoken* by Moses, before it is committed to writing. ... The reader comes to know the Torah as spoken by Moses, but Moses's [*sic*] spoken word is, from the outset, a written word within the book of Deuteronomy. If irony is to be found in Deuteronomy, it is that irony of the unavoidable character of the written form. Deuteronomy makes a powerful virtue of such an ironical necessity.²²

20 Matthieu Pageau, *The Language of Creation. Cosmic Symbolism in Genesis. A Commentary* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2018), 178.

21 Otto, *Deuteronomium* 23,16–34,12, 2286.

22 Sonnet, *Book*, 261.

Das Deuteronomium – und mit ihm der ganze Pentateuch – kann nicht mit der Landnahme enden, weil die Tora abgeschlossen und verschriftet sein muss, bevor Israel ins verheißene Land eintritt. Noch bevor Israel den Jordan durchquert, wird Josua der mosaischen Tora unterstellt (Jos 1,7–8), so dass Norbert Lohfink schreiben kann: „Das Buch Josua, so nahtlos es sich ans Deuteronomium anzuschließen scheint, stellt sich dem ganzen Pentateuch zugleich auf eine radikale Weise gegenüber.“²³ Und Mose kann nicht ins verheißene Land mitgehen, weil mit seiner Anwesenheit die Tora nicht abgeschlossen sein könnte. Denn er hat JHWH von Angesicht zu Angesicht erkannt (Dtn 34,10) und seine Anwesenheit im verheißenen Land würde die verschriftete Tora konkurrieren, die aber doch gerade gegeben ist für das Leben im Land (siehe exemplarisch die Ansageformel des Deuteronomischen Gesetzes in Dtn 12,1: Die Satzungen und Rechtsentscheide werden gegeben für das Leben „im Land, das Jahwe, der Gott deiner Väter, dir gegeben hat, es einzunehmen“ und sie sollen gehalten werden „solange du im Lande lebst“).

6 Fazit: Ist es wirklich Ironie?

Die „Ironie der Geschichte“ zielt im Deuteronomium also letztlich darauf ab, dass die Landverheißung, welche die Erzväter empfangen haben, erst in Erfüllung gehen kann, wenn Israel die Tora hat, die es für das Leben im Land braucht. Und diese Tora tritt an die Stelle des Mose: Er ist für die Adressaten des Deuteronomiums „nur in der Tora präsent und nicht in einer Grabtradition. Eine Verehrung des Moses kann nur die der verschrifteten Tora und ihre gehorsame Erfüllung sein.“²⁴ Darum muss Mose das Volk für eine Zukunft vorbereiten, an der er selbst keinen Anteil haben wird und er muss Josua als Nachfolger einsetzen, der gemäß Dtn 34,10 und Jos 1,7–8 aber nicht dieselbe Autorität wie Mose hat, sondern der verschrifteten Tora unterstellt ist. Das Deuteronomium zielt damit auf eine Trennung von Sprecher und Hörerschaft ab, deren Symbol der Jordan und dessen Durchquerung ist.²⁵ Alle oben besprochenen Stellen mit „ironischem“ Charakter stehen dazu in Bezug, sei es die Ironie des „Schicksals“, die Mose nicht ins verheißene Land gehen lässt, sei es die Ironie des Fluches, der Israel bei Bundesbruch zurück nach

23 Norbert Lohfink, „Moses Tod, die Tora und die alttestamentliche Sonntagslesung,“ *TP* 71 (1996): 481–494 (486).

24 Otto, *Deuteronomium* 23,16–34,12, 2282.

25 Sonnet, *Book*, 33.

Ägypten führt, indem Segen (Schiffe am Schilfmeer, Ägypten will die Israeliten nicht als Sklaven haben) in Fluch verkehrt wird, sei es der Umstand, dass die durch Mose selbst erfolgte Verschriftung der Tora seinen Tod erfordert, damit sie wirklich als mosaische Autorität in Kraft treten kann. Wenn man also die „Ironie der Geschichte“ so definiert, dass eine allgemeine, ideale Erwartung zur effektiv eintretenden Wirklichkeit in Gegensatz gerät, dann besteht die Ironie des Deuteronomiums darin, dass die Landverheißung an den Gehorsam des Volkes gegenüber dem Gotteswort gebunden ist, dass aber gerade Mose, der das ungehorsame Volk zum verheißenen Land führt, aufgrund des Gotteswortes selber nicht in das verheißene Land darf.

Da es sich bei vorliegendem Aufsatz um einen Beitrag zu einem Sammelband zu Ironie in der Bibel handelt, möchte ich abschließend fragen, ob Ironie wirklich die zutreffende Kategorie ist, um das, was man auch die „Tragik des Mose“ nennen könnte, zu beschreiben. Dafür spricht zunächst einmal, dass mehrere Exegeten unabhängig voneinander an verschiedenen Stellen, die alle um diese „Tragik des Mose“ kreisen, von „Ironie“ sprechen,²⁶ auch wenn alle, die hier genannt wurden, auf eine Theorie der Ironie verzichten. Diese Ironie ist aber keine gegen Mose gerichtete Ironie, die ihn vorführen soll. Es ist weder eine vom Erzähler noch von Gott intendierte Ironie, sondern es ist eben eine Ironie, die in der Sache liegt, welche die Tragik des Mose ausmacht. Insofern meine ich, dass die Kategorie der objektiven Ironie am besten passt, auch wenn Mose nicht einfach Spielball eines zufälligen Schicksals ist, sondern von Gott berufener und gebrauchter Prophet, der eine große Aufgabe zu erfüllen hat, bei der es aber in der Natur der Sache liegt, dass er die Früchte seiner Arbeit nicht selber genießen kann. Ist innerhalb des Alten Testaments die Bestimmung des Mose darin erfüllt, dass er Israel die Tora für das Leben im Land mitgibt, so tritt Mose im Neuen Testament an der Seite Jesu wieder auf (Mt 17,1–13 parr.) und wird zum Sinnbild derer, die durch den Glauben „Gottes Zeugnis empfangen und doch nicht erlangt haben, was verheißen war, weil Gott etwas Besseres für uns vorgesehen hat; denn sie sollten nicht ohne uns vollendet werden“ (Heb 11,40–41). Die Trennung zwischen Mose und dem Volk wird hier eschatologisch aufgehoben und damit auch die Ironie des Deuteronomiums.

26 Hier die Zusammenstellung der Passagen: Dtn 1,40–46: McCoville, *Deuteronomy*, 72; Dtn 3,28: Sonnet, *Book*, 33; Dtn 28,68: Pageau, *Language of Creation*, 178; Dtn 30,10; 31,26: Sonnet, *Book*, 261; Dtn 32,49: Sonnet, *Book*, 223; Dtn 34,1–5: Polzin, *Moses*, 71.

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PART 2

Irony in the Writings



Gottes Fragen: Ironie in der ersten Gottesrede des Ijobbuchs (Ijob 38,1–39,30)

Tobias Häner

„Yahweh is speaking ironically – that is plain.“¹ David Clines’ Feststellung in Bezug auf die erste Gottesrede im Ijobbuch würde vermutlich die große Mehrzahl der Ausleger*innen zustimmen.² Indes war die Ironie in Ijob 38–39 bisher nur selten Gegenstand vertiefter Analyse. In den Untersuchungen von MacKenzie, Sarrazin, Fuchs und Ritter-Müller werden grundsätzliche Aspekte der Ironie in Ijob 38–39 benannt,³ ohne allerdings eine hinreichende Differenzierung der verschiedenen Formen der Ironien in Gottes erster Rede an Ijob vorzunehmen und davon ausgehend deren rhetorische Funktionen präzise zu erfassen. Im Anschluss an die bisherige Forschung werden in der vorliegenden Studie drei Formen von Ironien unterscheiden: antiphrastische Ironien, die durch den Gegensatz zwischen der Feststellung von Ijobs Unwissenheit in 38,2 und den Aufforderungen und Affirmationen, die auf Ijobs Wissen rekurren, hervorgerufen werden; ironische Gehalte in rhetorischen Fragen; sowie ironische Momente, die auf subtilen Anspielungen zu den Ijob- und Freundesreden beruhen. Die drei Formen von Ironien werden im Folgenden näher beschrieben und anhand einiger Beispiele im Text dargestellt. Abschließend werden die Funktionen der Ironien innerhalb der erzählten Welt sowie deren Ziele auf der Ebene der Kommunikation zwischen Autorfiguration und impliziten Adressat*innen erörtert.

1 David J. Clines, *Job 38–42* (Nashville, TN and Dallas, TX: Thomas Nelson, 2011), 1180.

2 Unter den neueren Kommentaren findet die Ironie in Ijob 38–41 nähere Beachtung in John G. Janzen, *Job* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox, 1985), 225–241; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 517–548; Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: A Reading of Job, with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 338–349; Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1039–1136.

3 Roderick A. MacKenzie, „The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job,“ *Bib* 40 (1959): 435–445; Bernard Sarrazin, „Du rire dans la Bible? La théophanie de Job comme parodie,“ *RSR* 76 (1988): 39–56; Gisela Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung: Aufnahme und Umdeutung altorientalischer Vorstellungen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1993), 191–194, 204–208; Petra Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt? Gottes Antwort an Ijob: Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und exegetische Studie zur ersten Gottesrede Ijob 38 und 39* (Münster: Lit, 2000), 263–277.

1 Antiphrastische Ironie

Die antiphrastische Ironie (*antiphrasis*) stellt in der antiken Rhetorik sowie in Mittelalter und Renaissance den eigentlichen Kern dessen dar, was unter dem Begriff der Ironie verstanden wird, und ist dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass das Gegenteil des Gesagten gemeint ist.⁴ Der Begriff des Gegenteils ist dabei in zweifacher Hinsicht zu differenzieren: Einerseits kann dieses sowohl auf propositionaler (z.B. „schön“ anstelle von „hässlich“) als auch auf illokutionärer Ebene angesiedelt sein (z.B. Tadel durch Lob); andererseits kann sowohl ein konträrer (z.B. „gut“ anstelle von „böse“) als auch ein kontradiktorischer Gegensatz (z.B. „wahr“ anstelle von „unwahr“) zwischen dem Gesagten und dem Gemeinten vorliegen.⁵ Nach dem Verständnis der antiken Rhetorik ist die antiphrastische Ironie zudem auf ein einzelnes Wort (*unius verbi ironia*) beschränkt. Schließlich überschneidet sich die *antiphrasis* begrifflich mit dem Sarkasmus, der von Haiman definiert wird als „overt irony intentionally used by the speaker as a form of verbal aggression“⁶ und der oft durch eine gegenteilige Aussage zum Ausdruck gebracht wird. Ausgehend von Haimans Definition erscheint der Begriff des Sarkasmus dort angebracht, wo die durch die Antiphrase geäußerte Kritik stark akzentuiert wird und (fast) unverdeckt bleibt.

In 38,2 wird Ijob von Gott durch das Partizip **מוחשיך** („verdunkelnd“) und die Apposition **בלי־דעת** („ohne Erkenntnis“), die sich auf Ijobs „Worte“ (**מלין**) bezieht, zweifach kritisiert, wobei zwischen beiden Aussagen ein enger Zusammenhang besteht, da das „Verdunkeln“ des „Rates“ (**עצה**) als Metapher dient für Ijobs fehlende Kenntnis, die sich in seinen Reden offenbart. In konträrem Widerspruch dazu folgt in V. 3 der Imperativ **הודיעני** („belehre mich!“). Verstärkt wird der Gegensatz durch die Wiederholung der Wurzel **ידע** („wissen, kennen“): Der unwissende Ijob (**בלי־דעת** „ohne Kenntnis“ 38,2) soll

4 So umschreibt Anaximenes von Lampsakos die Ironie als „εν τοις εναντιοις νομομασι τα πραγματα προσαγορευειν“ („in gegenteiligen Begriffen die Dinge aussagen“, Anaximenes, *Rhet. Alex.* 1434a.18–19), und auch für Quintilian ist die Ironie (als tropus) dadurch gekennzeichnet, dass etwas durch das Gegenteil zum Ausdruck gebracht wird (Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.6.54–56), vgl. Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008), 302–303; zum Verständnis von Ironie als Antiphrase in Mittelalter und Renaissance vgl. Dilwyn Knox, *Ironia: Medieval and Renaissance Ideas on Irony* (Leiden, New York: Brill, 1989), 12–18.

5 Vgl. Knox, *Ironia*, 19–37; Lapp, *Linguistik der Ironie*, 18–28.

6 John Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20. Zum Begriff des Sarkasmus vgl. auch John Haiman, „Sarcasm as Theater“, *Cognitive Linguistics* 1 (1990): 181–206, und Matthew C. Pawlak, „How to be Sarcastic in Greek: Typical Means of Signaling Sarcasm in the New Testament and Lucian“, *Humor* 32 (2019): 545–564.

sein Wissen kundtun (יָדַע *hiphil*). Die Kommunikationssituation (Gott als Sprecher, Ijob als Adressat) lässt keinen Zweifel, dass die Aufforderung in V. 3b unaufrichtig und folglich ironisch ist,⁷ denn, wie ein Blick in den Psalter zeigt, wäre vielmehr die umgekehrte Sprechrichtung zu erwarten, nämlich dass der Mensch Gott um Belehrung bitten würde.⁸

Der in 38,2–3 artikulierte Gegensatz zwischen Ijobs Wissensanspruch und seiner tatsächlichen Unwissenheit setzt sich fort in den weiteren Aufforderungen und Aussagen, die Ijobs Wissen betreffen. So folgt in V. 4b der Imperativ הִגֵּד („tu kund!“), gefolgt von einem Konditionalsatz, der mit dem Verb יָדַע und dem Nomen בִּינָה („Einsicht“) gleich doppelt auf Ijobs fehlende Kenntnis anspielt. Der Relativsatz in V. 5a verwendet erneut das Verb יָדַע und intensiviert damit die Ironie der Eingangsverse. Schließlich wiederholt V. 18b fast wörtlich V. 4b, bevor in V. 21a noch einmal das Verb יָדַע (2. per. sg.) wiederkehrt. Als ironisch ist schließlich auch die Aussage über das hohe Alter Ijobs in V. 21b zu bestimmen, die an die Eingangsfrage über den Aufenthaltsort Ijobs am Anfang der Welterschöpfung anknüpft (V. 4a). Wie die Aufforderungen und affirmativen Äußerungen über das Wissen Ijobs ist auch hier die Ironie antiphrastisch konturiert, denn die Aussage über die Größe der Zahl von Ijobs Lebenstagen verweist auf die Kürze der Zeitspanne, die Ijob in seinem Leben überblicken kann gemessen an den seit dem Anbeginn der Schöpfung vergangenen Zeitaltern.

2 Rhetorische Fragen

Außer in den erwähnten Imperativen und Affirmationen setzt sich der ironische Gegensatz zwischen 38,2 und 3b auch in Interrogativsätzen fort, die auf Ijobs Wissen rekurren und damit indirekt die in V. 2 formulierte Kritik wachrufen. Am deutlichsten kommt die Anknüpfung an den Eingangsvers bei den vier Fragen zur Geltung, die das Verb יָדַע (2. per. sg.) aufgreifen (38,12b.33a; 39,1a.2b), aber auch in 38,4–6.16–19.22; 39,1–2.26 fragt JHWH nach dem Erkennen

7 Mit Lapp, *Linguistik der Ironie*, 133–152 ist die Simulation (d.h. der Scheinvollzug) der Unaufichtigkeit als Wesensmerkmal ironischer Äußerungen zu bestimmen. Während bei der Lüge (oder Unehrllichkeit oder Heuchelei) der Sprecher vortäuscht, aufrichtig zu sein, gibt er bei einer ironischen Äußerung vor, unaufichtig zu sein (d.h. zu lügen oder zu heucheln), macht die Simulation aber zugleich erkennbar durch die Inkongruenz gegenüber dem sprachlichen oder außersprachlichen Kontext der Äußerung bzw. gegenüber der von Sprecher und Adressat geteilten Hintergrundinformation.

8 Vgl. Ps 25,4; 39,5; 143,8 sowie Ex 33,13, wo jeweils יָדַעַי („belehren“) impv. 2. per. sg. + suf. 1. per. sg. in einer Bitte an Gott verwendet wird.

bzw. den Kenntnissen Ijobs.⁹ Durch den Modus der Frage wird – im Vergleich zu den Imperativen und Affirmationen – das antiphrastische Moment zurückgenommen. Da es sich aber um rhetorische Fragen handelt, die folglich pragmatisch nicht als Interrogative, sondern als indirekte Behauptungen fungieren,¹⁰ kommt auch hier der ironische Gegensatz zum Eingangsvers zum Tragen. Eine kontradiktorischer Aspekt kommt zudem der kommunikativen Rahmensituation zu, da Gott von einem Menschen Belehrung erbittet (anstatt umgekehrt).

Die Mehrheit der über dreißig Satzfragen bezieht sich allerdings nicht auf Ijobs (mangelnde) Kenntnis, sondern die Begrenztheit seiner Verfügungsgewalt, da Gott überwiegend nach Ijobs Tun statt nach seinem Wissen fragt.¹¹ Der Betonung der Beschränktheit von Ijobs Wirkungsbereich wird dabei die Wirkmacht Gottes gegenübergestellt. Die rhetorischen Satzfragen wechseln sich nämlich ab mit 15 ׀-Fragen, die zumeist auf JHWH als Subjekt verweisen, wie auch die dazwischen eingestreuten Verben der 1. per. sg. verdeutlichen.¹² Vor allem im zweiten Teil der Rede (38,39–39,30) häufen sich zudem nicht-interrogative Sätze, die oftmals Dritte (weder JHWH noch Ijob) zum Subjekt haben und damit als deskriptive Passagen zu bestimmen sind. Gemäß der Interpretation Keels erweist sich hierbei die erste Gottesrede als adäquate Antwort auf die Ijobreden, da sie den in der Eingangsklage (Ijob 3), aber auch etwa in Ijobs Anti-Hymnen in 9,5–10 und 12,13–25 implizierten Vorwurf, der Kosmos sei chaotisch und ungeordnet, durch den Verweis auf „den immer neu Kosmos schaffenden Gott“¹³ entkräfte.

Es scheint aber fraglich, ob bei dieser Deutung die ironische Stoßrichtung der Gottesrede ausreichende Beachtung findet. Denn durch die antiphrastischen

9 38,16 (und 22a) verwendet zwar zwei Verben der Bewegung (בוא „kommen“, הלך „gehen“) und V. 17 (und 22b) solche des Sehens (גלה „sichtbar werden“, ראה „sehen“), der Akzent liegt aber auch hier auf den (fehlenden) Kenntnissen Ijobs bezüglich der genannten Bereiche, vgl. Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1106–1107.

10 Zu den rhetorischen Fragen als indirekte Behauptungen vgl. Irene Koshik, *Beyond Rhetorical Questions: Assertive Questions in Everyday Interaction* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2005), 147–159.

11 Vgl. die detaillierten Auflistungen der unterschiedlichen Formen von Fragesätzen in der ersten Gottesrede durch Klaudia Engljähriger, *Theologie im Streitgespräch: Studien zur Dynamik der Dialoge des Buches Ijob* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2003), 168–172; Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 56–57.

12 Von den (ebenfalls) 20 mit einem Fragewort eingeleiteten Sätzen beginnen 15 mit מי („wer?“) und verweisen – mit Ausnahme von 38,2, wo Ijob gemeint ist – meistens implizit auf Gott.

13 Othmar Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob: Eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 159.

Ironien in 38,3–5 entfaltet die ironische Kritik Ijobs gleich am Beginn der Rede prägende Wirkung und nimmt vor allem in der vorderen Hälfte des ersten Redeteils (vgl. 38,12.16–18.20–21) eine prominente Stellung ein. Darüber hinaus wird der Vorrang der ironischen Infragestellung auf struktureller und quantitativer Ebene erkennbar. Die über 30 Satzfragen, die Ijobs Unwissen oder Unvermögen hervorheben, überwiegen nämlich zahlenmäßig deutlich gegenüber den 15 ׀-Fragen („wer?“), die Gottes Wirkmacht und umfassende Kenntnis hervorheben. Zugleich stehen den lediglich 6 Verbformen mit Gott als Subjekt nicht weniger als 36 Verben der 2. per. sg. mit Ijob als Subjekt gegenüber; die Anzahl von 4 Suffixen der 1. per. sg. (Referenz auf Gott) gegenüber 15 der 2. per. sg. (Referenz auf Ijob) ergibt ein ähnliches Bild.¹⁴ In struktureller Hinsicht ist festzustellen, dass 9 der 17 Strophen der Gottesrede mit einer rhetorischen Frage beginnen, die auf Ijobs begrenzte Kenntnisse oder Fähigkeiten abhebt, und weitere 5 Strophen mit einer solchen sowohl einsetzen als auch enden, während lediglich 3 Strophen keine solche Infragestellung Ijobs aufweisen.¹⁵ Auf perlokutionärer Ebene wirkt die ironische Kritik Ijobs indes auch in jenen Textbereichen fort, die implizit oder explizit nach dem Handeln Gottes fragen bzw. dieses beschreiben, da sie indirekt ebenfalls auf die Beschränktheit von Ijobs Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten verweisen.

3 Anspielungsironie

Unter dem Begriff der *simulatio* wird in der antiken Rhetorik die „positive[n] Vortäuschung einer eigenen, mit einer Meinung der Gegenpartei übereinstimmenden Meinung“¹⁶ gefasst. Damit sind die Grundzüge dessen vorgezeichnet, was von Marika Müller als Anspielungsironie beschrieben wird.¹⁷ Spezifisches Kennzeichen der Anspielungsironie ist die Ähnlichkeit einer Textpassage zu einem Referenztext (= dem Prätext), auf den (im Phänotext) unter vermeintlicher Zustimmung anspielend oder zitierend verwiesen wird. Dabei sind zwei Formen von Anspielungen zu unterscheiden, nämlich *intratextuelle*

14 Vgl. Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 43–46.85–91.

15 Bezüglich der strophischen Gliederung von Ijob 38–39 folge ich Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1085–1087. Eine auf Ijobs Kenntnis oder Können bezogene rhetorische Frage steht am Beginn der Strophen 38,4–7.12–15.28–30.34–38.39–41; 39,1–4; 19–25.26–30 sowie am Anfang und Ende der Strophen 38,16–18.19–21.22–24.31–33; 39,9–12; keine solche rhetorische Fragen enthalten lediglich die Strophen 38,8–11; 39,5–8.13–18.

16 Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, §902.

17 Vgl. Marika Müller, *Die Ironie: Kulturgeschichte und Textgestalt* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995), 177–212.

und *intertextuelle* Referenzen. Bei Ersteren sind die Ironien als Teil der intradiegetischen Kommunikation erkennbar – etwa als ironische Anspielung eines Aktanten auf eine vorangehende Rede des Gegenübers – bei Letzteren dagegen fungieren die Ironien als rhetorisches Mittel auf extradiegetischer Ebene. Die Kategorie der Anspielungsironien überlappt sich mit der Parodie und der Satire, die ebenfalls auf Ähnlichkeit beruhen. Wie bezüglich der Antiphrase und dem Sarkasmus geht auch hier der Versuch scharfer terminologischer Abgrenzung fehl, insofern die Parodie – und in ähnlicher Weise auch die Satire – wie Linda Hutcheon festhält, eine „ironische Distanz“ zum parodierten Text hervorruft.¹⁸ Eine Unterscheidung lässt sich indes dahingehend treffen, dass die Anspielungsironie das rhetorische Mittel, Parodie und Satire dagegen textliche Genres bezeichnen, bei denen jenes zur Anwendung kommt, wobei wiederum die Parodie sich dadurch auszeichnet, dass sie auf den Bezugstext selbst zielt, die Satire dagegen auf die darin verhandelte Sache.¹⁹

Bereits der Eingangsvers der Gottesrede enthält eine bedeutsame Anspielung. Das Partizip מַחֲשִׁיךְ („verdunkelnd“), das wir oben als Metapher für Ijobs „Worte ohne Einsicht“ (בְּלִי-דַעַת) bestimmt haben, zeigt nämlich einen Bezug zu Ijob 3 an.²⁰ Denn dort ist das Motiv der Dunkelheit im ersten Canto (3,3–10) bestimmend, da es bei Ijobs Verfluchung des Tages seiner Geburt durch den Ausruf יְהִי חֹשֶׁךְ („es werde Dunkelheit“) auf markante Weise eingeführt wird und in allen vier Strophen des Cantos wiederkehrt.²¹ Zugleich ist der Gebrauch des Verbs חֹשֶׁךְ („dunkel sein“) in 38,2 auffällig, da es sonst in der Hebräischen Bibel nie im übertragenen Sinn verwendet wird und bei transitiver Verwendung meist Gott als Subjekt fungiert;²² hier dagegen ist es

18 Hutcheon hält bezüglich der Ironie in Parodien fest: „Irony participates in parodic discourse as a strategy ... Unlike imitation, quotation, or even allusion, parody requires ... ironic distance.“ Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (London: Methuen, 1985), 34.

19 Zur Unterscheidung von Parodie und Satire vgl. Hutcheon, *Theory of Parody*, 43–49, die auf die Definitionen von Ziva Ben-Porat, „Method in MADness: Notes on the Structure of Parody, Based on MAD TV Satires“, *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 245–72 rekurriert.

20 Eine (ironische) Anspielung von Ijob 38,2 auf Ijob 3 machen auch Samuel Terrien, „The Yahweh Speeches and Job's Responses“, *RevExp* 68 (1971): 497–509 (501), Jürgen van Oorschot, *Gott als Grenze: Eine literar- und redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Gottesreden des Hiobbuches* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1987), 26–28 und Collin R. Cornell, „God and the Sea in Job 38“, *JHebS* 12 (2012): 1–15 (7) geltend.

21 Zur Struktur von Ijob 3 vgl. Gianni Barbiero, „The Structure of Job 3“, *ZAW* 127 (2015): 43–62. In Ijob 3,3–9 treten fünf Lexeme auf, die das Dunkel bezeichnen: חֹשֶׁךְ (Nomen: „Dunkelheit“) V. 4; צְלֻמוֹת („Todesdunkel“) V. 5; אֶפֶל („Dunkel“) V. 6; חֹשֶׁךְ (Verb: „dunkel sein“) V. 9.

22 Das Verb חֹשֶׁךְ kommt in der Hebräischen Bibel elfmal im *qal* und sechsmal im *hiphil* vor, wobei im intransitiven Gebrauch vor allem אֱוֶר („Licht“ Jes 5,30; 13,10; Ijob 18,6)

Ijob, der von JHWH beschuldigt wird zu „verdunkeln“. Umgekehrt wären in Verbindung mit dem Objekt עצה („Rat“) eher die Verben סכל (*piel* „vereiteln“) – wie in 2 Sam 15,31 – oder בלע (*piel* „verschlucken = zunichtemachen“) – wie in Jes 19,3 – zu erwarten. Der Gebrauch des Partizips מחשיך erweist sich daher als scheinbar unpassend und kommt folglich als mögliches Ironiesignal in den Blick. Die Korrespondenz zu Ijob 3,3–10 bestätigt diese Vermutung. Dort nämlich scheint Ijob tatsächlich den göttlichen „Rat“ (עצה) verdunkeln zu wollen, da seine Eingangsklage mit Leo Perdue als „Angriff auf die Schöpfung“ („assault on creation“)²³ umschrieben werden kann. Wie sich hier zeigt, geht die Gottesrede also dahingehend auf die vorgängigen Ijobreden ein, dass sie am Anfang auf deren Beginn in Ijob 3 anspielt, dabei aber den Vorwurf Ijobs ironisch untergräbt, da durch die Anfügung, dass es „Worte ohne Einsicht“ sind, mit denen Ijob den „Plan verdunkeln“ wollte, die in Ijob 3 implizierten Angriffe für haltlos erklärt werden.

Neben dem Partizip מחשיך (Ijob 38,2), das auf Ijob 3 anspielt, gibt es in der Eingangspassage der Gottesrede ein zweites Element, das eine ironische Anspielung signalisiert. Gottes Aufforderung an Ijob zur Belehrung in 38,3b spiegelt Ijobs zweifache Bitte in 13,22f, Gott möge ihn befragen oder aber ihm antworten und ihn über seine Verfehlungen belehren.²⁴ Habel erkennt die ironische Spitze dieser Anspielung in der Verwendung des Verbs „belehren“ (ידע *hiphil*), da Ijob nur vom „Antworten“ (ענה, שוב *hiphil* 13,22) spricht, wodurch der Kontrast zwischen JHWHs umfassendem Wissen und Ijobs Ignoranz unterstrichen werde.²⁵ Indes gebraucht Ijob in 13,23b dieselbe Verbform (הודיעני), die nun in 38,3b wiederkehrt.²⁶ Zudem richtet Ijob auch in seiner vorangehenden Rede eine ähnliche Bitte an Gott (10,2), die ebenfalls dieselbe Aufforderung zur Belehrung (הודיעני) enthält. Angesichts dieser Übereinstimmung scheint der Ironie in 38,3b ein parodierender Unterton beigegeben zu sein. Die doppelte Anspielung auf 10,2 und 13,22f unterstreicht die oben beschriebene Stoßrichtung der antiphrastischen Ironie der Eingangspassage, legt den Akzent aber auf die Zurückweisung von Ijobs Forderung nach einer Belehrung über die eigenen Verfehlungen – und damit auf die Ablehnung seines Verlangens nach einer Gegenüberstellung mit Gott im Rechtsstreit, von dem er überzeugt

oder עין („Auge“ Ps 69,24; Kgl 5,17) als Subjekt fungieren; bei der transitiven Verwendung ist dagegen meist Gott Subjekt (Jer 13,16; Am 5,8, 8,9; Ps 105,28; Jer 13,16), vgl. DCH 3:331.

23 Leo G. Perdue, „Job's Assault on Creation“, *HAR* 10 (1986): 295–315.

24 Vgl. Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1989), 500; Hans Strauß, *Hiob* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 357; Clines, *Job* 38–42, 1097.

25 Habel, *Book of Job*, 536.

26 Das Verb ידע kommt im *hiphil* („belehren“) vor der ersten Gottesrede auch in 26,3; 32,7 und 37,19 vor, aber nicht in identischer Form wie in 10,2; 13,23 und 38,3.

ist, daraus als Sieger hervorgehen zu können. In der ersten Gottesrede wird dieses Begehren Ijobs abgewiesen, indem ihm auf ironische Weise die Voraussetzungen zu einer solchen Auseinandersetzung abgesprochen werden.

4 Funktionen der Ironien auf intradiegetischer Ebene

Auf der Ebene der intradiegetischen Kommunikation zwischen Gott und Ijob erscheint bedeutsam, dass die Antiphrasen und rhetorischen Fragen und Anspielungen eine direkte Kritik vermeiden. Dies wird bereits im Eingangsvers deutlich: Indem die Kritik in 38,2 in einen Fragesatz gekleidet und zudem durch das unbestimmte „wer?“ (ׁ) nicht unmittelbar an Ijob gerichtet ist, erfährt sie eine gewisse Abschwächung. Die Indirektheit der rhetorischen Fragen und Aufforderungen sowie der antiphrastischen Aussagen setzt diese Abmilderung der Kritik fort: Anstatt eines barschen „du weißt nicht“ bekommt Ijob ein ironisches „du weißt es“ (vgl. V. 4b.5a.18b.21a) zu hören. So nennt denn auch Strauß die Ironie in 38,3b sokratisch bzw. mäeutisch,²⁷ während Terrien die ironische Kritik Ijobs als „curteous and wistful“²⁸ umschreibt.

Die soziolinguistische und textpragmatische Ironieforschung bestätigt die hier geltend gemachte abmildernde Funktion. Wie Leech aufzeigt, bewahrt die verbale Ironie wörtlich genommen das Prinzip der Höflichkeit, da der Adressat die ironische Kritik (durch Zurückweisung der wörtlichen Bedeutung) selbst erschließen muss.²⁹ Leech bezeichnet die Ironie daher auch als Ersatz für Unhöflichkeit und umschreibt sie als „mock politeness“³⁰. Verstärkt wird der abmildernde Effekt zudem, wenn – wie in Ijob 38–39 – der Sprecher in

²⁷ Strauß, *Hiob*, 357.

²⁸ Terrien, „Yahweh Speeches,“ 501; vgl. Michael V. Fox, „Job 38 and God's Rhetoric,“ *Semeia* 19 (1981): 53–61 (58).

²⁹ Geoffrey N. Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 82–83 spricht vom Ironieprinzip, das als Prinzip zweiter Ordnung auf dem Höflichkeits- und dem Kooperationsprinzip aufbaut und das er folgendermaßen umschreibt: „If you must cause offence, at least do so in a way which doesn't overtly conflict with the PP [= Politeness Principle, T. H.], but allows the hearer to arrive at the offensive point of your remark indirectly, by way of implicature.“ (Leech, *Principles of Pragmatics*, 82). Zu Strategien der Abmilderung (Mitigation) im Biblischen Hebräisch vgl. Marco Di Giulio, „Mitigating Devices in Biblical Hebrew,“ *Kleine Untersuchungen zur Sprache des Alten Testaments und seiner Umwelt* 8/9 (2008): 33–62.

³⁰ Geoffrey N. Leech, *The Pragmatics of Politeness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 232. Wie Leech ausführt, hat Ironie eine offensive Seite, da sie eine – Gesichtsverlust erzeugende – Kritik oder Anschuldigung und damit einen Effekt der Unhöflichkeit erzielt, und eine defensive Seite, da die Unhöflichkeit verdeckt bleibt und daher nicht leicht durch einen direkten Gegenangriff vergolten werden kann.

der Position des Überlegenen ist und daher die Möglichkeit hätte, ohne Risiko eine – das Gebot der Höflichkeit verletzende – direkte Kritik anzubringen.³¹ Die Ironie Gottes gegenüber Ijob erweist sich davon ausgehend in kommunikationstheoretischer Hinsicht als Deeskalationsstrategie.

Darüber hinaus wird durch die ironischen Anspielungen erkennbar, dass Ijob in der ersten Gottesrede insofern recht gegeben wird, als die Ironie, deren Opfer er wird, in eine ähnliche Richtung weist wie seine eigenen ironischen Bemerkungen gegenüber seinen Freunden. Auf den belehrenden Ton der ersten Elifasrede, der vor allem im Schlussteil in den Vordergrund tritt,³² reagiert Ijob nämlich in seiner Antwort mit einem ironischen Zitat (6,24), das den Anspruch der Freunde auf kognitiven Vorrang untergräbt.³³ In ähnlicher Weise eröffnet er auch seine Antworten auf die ersten Reden Bildads und Zofars mit ironischen Erwidern (9,2; 12,2), deren zweite den Titel unserer Tagung abgibt. Auch am Beginn seiner letzten Antwort Ijobs auf die Freunde schließlich weist Ijob deren Vorhaben, ihn zu belehren, mittels spöttischer Ironie zurück (26,3).

Zielt damit Ijobs Ironisierung der Freunde darauf, diese als Besserwisser zu demaskieren, so wird nun in der ersten Gottesrede sein eigener Wissensanspruch Gegenstand ironisch unterlegter Zurechtweisung. Dabei aber erhält seine eigene Kritik der Freunde zugleich auch Bestätigung, insofern er seinerseits deren Wissensanspruch ironisiert hat. Dass die erste Gottesrede Ijob hinsichtlich seiner Auseinandersetzung mit den Freunden in gewisser Weise ins Recht setzt, wird zudem dadurch deutlich, dass auch die Positionen der Freunde mittels ironischer Anspielungen untergraben werden. So deutet sich in Abschnitt über den Löwen (38,39f) einerseits eine Anspielung zu 10,16 an: Dort klagt Ijob Gott an, dass er ihn wie ein Löwe jage,³⁴ wogegen die Gottesrede das

31 Vgl. dazu die Ergebnisse der empirischen Ironieforschung von Shelly Dews und Joan Kaplan, „Why not say it directly? The social functions of irony,“ *Discourse Processes* 19 (1995): 347–367; die Autor*innen weisen unter anderem auf die gesichtswahrende Funktion ironischer Kritik hin.

32 Der belehrende Tonfall kommt unter anderem in der dreifachen Wiederholung des Verbs **נָתַן** 2. per. sg. in 5,24.25.27 zum Ausdruck.

33 Mit Choon Leong Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 464–465 lässt sich Ijob 6,24 als parodierende Ironisierung des lehrhaften Tons Elifas' verstehen.

34 Syntaktisch bleibt in 10,16 unklar, ob der Vergleich „wie ein Löwe“ (**כַּשְׁחֹל**) auf Ijob (so Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* [New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1978], 114–115 und Seow, *Job 1–21*, 582) oder auf Gott (David J. Clines, *Job 1–20* [Waco: Word, 1989], 250) zu beziehen ist; das Zweite erscheint aber aufgrund der in 10,17 beschriebenen feindlichen Bedrohung, die Gott für Ijob abgibt, sowie mit Blick auf 16,9 wahrscheinlicher; vgl. Brent A. Strawn, *What is*

von Ijob verwendete Bild vom gefährlichen Raubtier mit der Fürsorge Gottes für die bedürftigen Löwenjungen kontrastiert und damit Ijobs Vorstellung von Gott als bedrohlichem Angreifer hinterfragt.³⁵ Andererseits wird in 38,39–40 aber auch eine Anspielung auf die erste Elifasrede erkennbar (4,10f).³⁶ Dieser gebraucht den Hungertod des Löwen und dessen Jungtieren als Bild für die Vergeltung Gottes an den Übeltätern, von denen er im Abschnitt zuvor spricht (4,8f). Im Gegensatz dazu bringt die erste Rede Gottes zum Ausdruck, dass dieser die Löwenfamilie mit Nahrung versorgt, und ironisiert damit Elifas' Verwendung des Bildes vom verhungern den Löwen zur Untermauerung des Vergeltungsprinzips. Wie dieses Beispiel zeigt, zielt die ironische Kritik der ersten Gottesrede nicht nur auf Ijob, sondern auch auf die Freunde. Damit aber setzt die Gottesrede Ijobs Ironisierung der Freunde – zumindest zu einem gewissen Grad – ins Recht.

5 Ziele der Ironien auf extradiegetischer Ebene

In einem einflussreichen Aufsatz vertritt Tsevat die These, dass die erste Gottesrede darauf ziele, das Vergeltungsprinzip zu negieren, um stattdessen eine amoralische göttliche Weltordnung zu präsentieren.³⁷ Tsevat verweist dabei einerseits auf das Schweigen des Textes zu der Frage der Gerechtigkeit Gottes bzw. des Menschen und im Besonderen Ijobs, andererseits auf Passagen wie die Strophe über den Regen (38,25–27), die implizit das Vergeltungsprinzip negieren. Was den ersten Punkt betrifft, fehlen tatsächlich die – in weisheitlichem Kontext und auch in den Ijob- und Freundesreden häufigen – Wortwurzeln צדק („gerecht“), ישר („aufrichtig“) und תמים („tadellos“) sowie חנף („gottlos“) in Ijob 38–39 vollständig, während רשע („frevlerisch“) lediglich

Stronger than a Lion? Leonine Image and Metaphor in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East (Fribourg: Academic Press and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005) 58–59.

35 Übereinstimmend verwenden 10,16 und 38,39 das Verb צוד („jagen“), das nur an diesen beiden Stellen im Ijobbuch vorkommt; indes gebraucht 38,39 anstelle von שחל („Löwe“) das Nomen לביא („Löwin“), das hier eventuell die Löwenmutter bezeichnet. Zu der Anspielung auf 10,16 in 38,39f vgl. auch Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 210–214.

36 Lexematisch verknüpft sind 4,10f und 38,39f mittels der Nomina כפיר („Junglöwe“), לביא („Löwin“) und טרף („Beute“); auf die Anspielung weist auch Ritter-Müller, *Kennst du die Welt?*, 209–210 hin.

37 Matitahu Tsevat, „The Meaning of the Book of Job,“ *HUCA* 37 (1966): 73–106; ihm folgt Alan Cooper, „The Sense of the Book of Job,“ *Prooftexts* 17 (1997): 227–244; gegen Tsevat's These argumentiert namentlich Fox, „Meanings of the Book of Job“.

zweimal in der Strophe über den Morgen (38,13.15) vorkommt.³⁸ Mit Blick auf die Funktion der Ironien auf intradiegetischer Ebene ließe sich aber diese semantische Leerstelle auch mit der Zurückweisung der Forderung Ijobs nach einem Rechtsstreit erklären. Es würde also nicht das Vergeltungsprinzip negiert, sondern eher, wie Clines argumentiert, aufgrund der mangelnden kognitiven Kompetenz Ijobs die Aussage verweigert.³⁹ In Bezug auf den zweiten Punkt hebt Tsevat hervor, dass das Spenden oder Entziehen von Regen ein primäres Instrument gerechter Vergeltung darstelle, weshalb die Erwähnung des Regnens auf unbewohnte Gegenden (38,26) auf eine Negierung des Vergeltungsprinzips hinauslaufe.⁴⁰ Dagegen ließe sich allerdings einwenden, dass in der Strophe eher eine anthropozentrische Weltsicht infrage gestellt werde, da in 38,26 zweimal ausdrücklich von der Menschenleere des beregneten Landes die Rede ist.⁴¹ Dass die erste Gottesrede die Anthropozentrik infrage stellt, deutet sich im Übrigen auch dadurch an, dass der Mensch in dem Durchgang durch die verschiedenen Bereiche des Kosmos weitgehend unerwähnt bleibt.

Neben der Infragestellung des Vergeltungsprinzips, die zu einem gewissen Grad vage bleibt, lassen einige Passagen der Gottesrede eine Ironisierung von mythologischen Motiven vermuten. Die Strophe über das Meer (38,8–11) beschreibt einerseits die Eingrenzung der Gewalt und der potentiellen Gefahr des Meeres als Chaosmacht (V. 8a.10–11) und zeigt damit eine Ähnlichkeit zur Chaoskampf-Motivik, wie sie etwa in *Enuma Elis* greifbar wird.⁴² In V. 8b.9 allerdings erscheint das Meer im Bild des neugeborenen Kindes. Der Kontrast zwischen dieser Metaphorisierung des Meeres als mütterlich umsorgtes Kleinkind zur Motivik des Kampfes gegen die Chaosmacht veranlasst Gisela Fuchs

38 Die Wurzel צדק („gerecht“) kommt vor den Gottesreden 30mal im Ijobbuch vor, ישר („aufrichtig“) elfmal, תמם („tadellos“) 16mal, חנף („gottlos“) achtmal, רשע („frevlerisch“) 36mal.

39 „Not a word is said of the justice or injustice of Job's treatment; Yahweh's silence can only be understood as a deliberate denial of Job's demand. (...) the absence of a response is itself a most telling response.“ Clines, *Job 38–42*, 1092.

40 Tsevat, „Meaning of the Book of Job“, 99–100.

41 So Brian R. Doak, *Consider Leviathan: Narratives of Nature and the Self in Job* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2014), 191–198. Auch Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Ein Weg durch das Leid: Das Buch Ijob* (Freiburg: Herder, 2007), 237 hebt hervor, dass die erste Gottesrede Ijob von der Anthropozentrik zur Theozentrik führe.

42 Vgl. den Kampf Marduks gegen Tiamat in *Enuma Elis* IV, wobei vor allem Z. 139–140 eine Ähnlichkeit zum Motiv der Begrenzung des Meeres in Ijob 38,8.10–11 aufweist. Auch der Kampf Baals gegen Jam im ugaritischen Baal-Zyklus (KTU 1.2) kann als Vergleich herangezogen werden.

dazu, hier auf eine Ironisierung der Chaoskampf-Motivik zu schließen.⁴³ Allerdings bleiben die Anspielungen auf die altorientalischen Mythologeme eher vage, weshalb mit Collin Cornell vorsichtiger von einer Umformung („reframing“) herkömmlicher Antagonismen zu sprechen ist.⁴⁴

Die hier skizzierte Vagheit bezüglich des Gegenstands der Ironie lässt auf eine Ambiguität im engeren Sinne – d.h. auf eine unentscheidbare Unvereinbarkeit – hinsichtlich des im Eingangsvers der Rede genannten Grundthemas, der עֶצָה („Rat“) – d.h. den Prinzipien der göttlichen Weltordnung – schließen. Ähnliche Effekte wie in der Strophe über das Meer (38,8–11) zeigen sich nämlich auch in weiteren Passagen der Gottesrede. Es ist dazu nochmals auf Keels These zurückzukommen, dass die erste Gottesrede auf Ijob 3 antworte, indem sie aufzeige, dass Gott das Chaos begrenze und dadurch immer neu Kosmos schaffe.⁴⁵ Keel stützt sich dabei vor allem auf den zweiten Teil der Gottesrede, wo Gott in der Gestalt des „Herrn der Tiere“ erscheine, der die in Löwe, Rabe etc. versinnbildlichten chaotischen Mächte in Schranken weise.⁴⁶ Dagegen ist aber einzuwenden, dass in Bezug auf die in der Rede beschriebenen Tiere (38,39–39,30) vielmehr eine ähnliche Tendenz wie in der Strophe über das Meer sichtbar wird, da etwa die Strophen über Löwe und Rabe (38,39–41) sowie über Steinbock und Hirschkuh (39,1–4) nicht Dominanz und Bändigung, sondern einen sorgenden Umgang JHWHs mit den beschriebenen Wildtieren zum Ausdruck bringen.⁴⁷ Anstelle der Dichotomie von Kosmos und Chaos im Sinne einer Abgrenzung von „innen“ und „außen“ tendiert damit die Gottesrede zur Ambiguierung, da die vermeintlich chaotischen Mächte in den göttlichen Verfügungsbereich integriert werden.⁴⁸

43 Fuchs, *Mythos und Hiobdichtung*, 195–200.

44 Wie Cornell „God and the Sea in Job 38,“ 11 feststellt, erscheint JHWH in Bezug auf das Meer als „caretaker rather than its jailer“. Eine ähnliche Umformung macht er auch in den weiteren Strophen der ersten sowie in der zweiten Gottesrede aus.

45 Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 159.

46 Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob*, 61–125.

47 Zur Kritik an Keels These bezüglich des Motivs des „Herrn der Tiere“ in Ijob 38,39–39,30 vgl. Ute Neumann-Gorsolke, *Wer ist der „Herr der Tiere“? Eine hermeneutische Problem-anzeige* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2012) und Manfred Oeming, „Kannst du der Löwin ihren Raub zu jagen geben?“ (Hi 38,39): Das Motiv des ‚Herrn der Tiere‘ und seine Bedeutung für die Theologie der Gottesreden Hi 38–42,“ in *„Dort ziehen Schiffe dahin ...“: Collected Communications to the XIVth Congress of the International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament, Paris 1992*, ed. Matthias Augustin and Klaus-Dietrich Schunck (Frankfurt, Berlin: Peter Lang, 1996), 147–163.

48 In diesem Sinne bilanziert Good, die erste Gottesrede porträtierte „an ambiguous world, whose order contains disorder, whose disorder undermines the order“ (Good, *In Turns of Tempest*, 348); auch Habel, *The Book of Job*, 534 bemerkt, Ijob 38–39 beschreibe „a world where paradox and incongruity are integral to its design“; vgl. auch André LaCocque, „Job

6 Konklusion

Marvin Pope qualifiziert die Gottesreden als „seemingly magnificent irrelevance“⁴⁹. Der nähere Blick auf die Ironien in der ersten Gottesrede hat dagegen deren „relevant inappropriateness“⁵⁰ im Rahmen des Kommunikationsgeschehens zwischen Ijob und JHWH sichtbar werden lassen: JHWHs Erwiderung an Ijob erfolgt nicht argumentativ, sondern allusiv, denn sie nimmt mittels ironischer Anspielungen auf Ijobs Reden Bezug, und sie zielt nicht allein auf Ijobs Klagen und Vorwürfe, sondern vor allem auf den Ankläger selbst, da diesem die kognitive Kompetenz abgesprochen wird, den eingeforderten Disput führen zu können. Innerhalb der erzählten Welt erweist sich folglich die erste Gottesrede unter Berücksichtigung ihrer ironischen Rhetorik zwar als überraschend, aber nicht unpassend, sondern rhetorisch überzeugend.

Hinsichtlich des Kommunikationsgeschehens zwischen dem Text und seinen Rezipient*innen zeigt sich auf der Grundlage der vorliegenden Studie, dass die Ironien in Ijob 38–39 nicht allein auf die Infragestellung zielen, sondern darüber hinaus als Alteritätsmarkierungen zu verstehen sind, die – mit einem Begriff des Philosophen und Theologen Eckhard Nordhofen – in Absetzung zur „usurpatorischen Theologie“ der Freunde Ijobs in Richtung einer „privativen Theologie“, d.h. einer Theologie der Vorenthaltung weisen.⁵¹ Das Ijobbuch fungiert damit als kritisches Korrektiv zum affirmativen theologischen Sprachformen des Psalters und des Sprüchebuchs, zu denen vielfache Anspielungen bestehen. Uwe Japp erörtert in seiner „Theorie der Ironie“ die Frage nach dem Wissen der Ironie und kommt zum Ergebnis, Letzteres sei „in erster Linie als die Frage nach dem Wissen zu verstehen.“⁵² In diesem Sinne verweist die erste Gottesrede auf ein Wissen von Gott und seinem „Rat“ (עצה), das jenseits des sprachlich Aussagbaren zu errahnen ist.

and Religion at its Best,” *BibInt* 4 (1996): 131–153 (141), der von einer „uncanny coexistence of stability and unstability“ hinsichtlich des in Ijob 38–39 entworfenen Weltbilds spricht.

49 Marvin H. Pope, *Job* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), lxxxi.

50 Als „relevant inappropriateness“ wird die (verbale) Ironie von Salvatore Attardo, „Irony as Relevant Inappropriateness,” *Journal of Pragmatics* 32 (2000): 793–826 (823) definiert.

51 Eckhard Nordhofen, *Corpora: Die anarchische Kraft des Monotheismus* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 19–21 et pass.

52 Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1983), 326.

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Ironic Criticism in the Prose Framework of Job

Raik Heckl

Regarding the question of the position of Job within the Hebrew Bible, the Babylonian Talmud quotes an anonymous disciple of Rabbi Shemuel b. Nahmani. He remarks that Job never existed and that he would not have been created and would instead be a parable (אִיּוֹב לֹא הָיָה וְלֹא נִבְרָא אֱלֹהִים מִשָּׁל). However, this statement is immediately rejected with a reference to the character's name and place in Job 1:1.¹ It is not without reason that the quotation has been handed down anonymously. The following attempts to date and locate Job and the book of Job by the Talmud tractate (b. B. Bat. 15a–16b) were probably due to the fact that the fictionality of biblical texts was a problematic supposition among the rabbis, unlike in the case of rabbinic stories. Thus, there was a minority opinion among the rabbis that the book of Job with the character of Job was a literary construct, a parable text. It is likely that this assumption seeks to avoid giving offense at the fact that here a perfect person was presented and that he additionally was thrown into disaster.² Since the early modern period, research on the book of Job has followed the thread of the anonymous disciple and spun it further: The prose framework was interpreted as a fairy tale³ or folk tale,⁴ as an allegory,⁵ as a comedy,⁶ Job as a fictitious character⁷ or the story of his fate as a transformation and imitation of the Deuteronomistic history of Israel.⁸ After the work of Roderick MacKenzie,

¹ This is a stereotypical answer which is also used, for example, in b. 'Erub. 63a in reference to an incident in a scholar's house.

² Konrad Schmid, *Hiob als biblisches und antikes Buch: Historische und intellektuelle Kontexte seiner Theologie* (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2010), 27.

³ Schmid, *Hiob als Buch*.

⁴ Karl Kautzsch, *Das sogenannte Volksbuch von Hiob und der Ursprung von Hiob Cap. I. II. XLII, 7–17: Ein Beitrag zur Frage nach der Integrität des Buches Hiob* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1900).

⁵ Ernest E. Kellett, "Job': An Allegory?" *ExpTim* 51 (1939): 250–251.

⁶ William Whedbee, "The Comedy of Job," *Semeia* 7 (1977): 1–39, 4.

⁷ Explicit: Ernst A. Knauf, "Ijobs multikulturelle Heimat," *BK* 59 (2004): 64–67.

⁸ Raik Heckl, *Hiob—Vom Gottesfürchtigen zum Repräsentanten Israels: Studien zur Buchwerdung des Hiobbuches und zu seinen Quellen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 476–478.

who found irony within the divine speeches of the book,⁹ and Edwin Good, who examined the dialogues in this respect,¹⁰ first James Williams saw the narrative passages as literary irony¹¹ that had been created with the poetry in mind. The theological positions raised in the poetic parts of the book and the self-presentation of God in the divine speeches were both subject to irony.¹² My contribution will furthermore deal with the question whether ironic criticism can be found as an aspect of the literary concept within the prose framework of the book of Job.

1 Intentionality and Literary Irony

Irony and ironic criticism are means of classical rhetoric. As a rhetorical element, irony serves to discredit, invalidate, or degrade positions by turning them into their opposite.¹³ Already in antiquity, it was considered and reflected as a stylistic and hermeneutical device. Its use serves to assert certain complex concepts and positions.¹⁴ Irony or ironic speech thus pragmatically belong inseparably to specific situations of communication and can be understood within their context. In the case of ancient biblical texts, which have always been transmitted anonymously and without precise dating, this makes it difficult to identify the scribes' intentions in the use of the rhetorical elements or the concepts and positions to which they refer.

Nevertheless, the situation must be assessed somewhat differently, because biblical texts—in contrast to what is sometimes assumed in research—cannot be seen as autonomous (non-intentional) literature. Researchers sometimes even doubt that biblical texts were part of a cultural literature and instead assume that they were known only in very small circles or were created only for scribal libraries.¹⁵ The existence of numerous intertextualities in biblical texts leads to the conclusion that the intended addressees are supposed to be familiar with the texts quoted and alluded to. While it is still possible that the

9 Roderick A. F. MacKenzie, "The Purpose of the Yahweh Speeches in the Book of Job," *Bib* 40 (1959): 435–445.

10 Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (London: SPCK, 1965), 196–240.

11 James G. Williams, "You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me': Mystery and Irony in Job," *ZAW* 83 (1971): 231–255, 236.

12 See Williams, "You Have Not Spoken Truth," 250–252.

13 Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik I* (München: Hueber, 1960), 302.

14 See Marika Müller, *Die Ironie: Kulturgeschichte und Textgestalt* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1995), 23.

15 Cf. Karel van der Toorn, *Scribal Culture and the Making of the Hebrew Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 147; Konrad Schmid, *Literaturgeschichte des Alten Testaments: Eine Einführung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2008), 45.

texts circulated in small groups of experts, the assumption that the texts were produced and revised for the library and thus serve a purpose in themselves must be rejected if the intertextualities are taken into account. However, the theological and political intentions apparent in the texts and the discernible attempts to influence the identity of the addressees show that many biblical books and texts had a specific place and function in particular contexts of communication. They were part of religious and political discourses.¹⁶ In the case of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch, the connection to certain discourses and the intentionality to influence the reader and to communicate information are evident because of several reasons. Some examples follow. a) Paraenetic structure and rhetoric in Deuteronomy serve to convince readers of certain mandates, norms, and values. b) The exemplary focus in Genesis on the eponymous ancestors aims at the later addressees. c) In Exodus and Leviticus, the narration of religious covenants concerns the later community. However, the prose framework of the book of Job, which creates an almost bizarre scene between heaven and earth, again raises the question: Is it a satire or should it be regarded as skeptical literature, as sometimes has been argued?¹⁷ Is this book, then, something like a prototype of autonomous literature? Was such a work intended to entertain already in antiquity? Or should it be regarded as intentional literature despite the satirical aspects it contains?

The answers to these questions may vary with regard to the different parts of the book. In my view, it is doubtful whether the instances of irony in the dialogues of the book of Job are always literary irony.¹⁸ The dialogues depend on the idea of a face-to-face communication between the characters. Irony could be used here as a rhetorical means that serves to characterize them. In contrast, the instances of irony in the divine speeches (Job 38:1–42:6) probably refer positively to the intended addressees' knowledge and thus intend to achieve an acceptance of its content, in which Job's answers then also fit in. In these speeches and in Job's answers, the universalism of YHWH and his worship appear as necessary conditions for comprehension despite the earlier focus on disaster and suffering.

16 Raik Heckl, "Die Interpretation von biblischen Texten als Diskursanalyse von Diskursfragmenten und ihre kulturwissenschaftliche Bedeutung," in *Diskurs—semiotisch: Aspekte multiformaler Diskurskodierung*, ed. Ernest W. B. Hess-Lüttich et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 211–224, 221.

17 Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job As Skeptical Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991), 213–217.

18 Does the author want to challenge religious orthodoxy with the positions of the friends, who "represent the unquestioning orthodoxy" as Good (*Irony*, 200) thinks, or does he try to find a mediating position between the dialogues in their sharp opposition to each other?

Regarding the prose framework of the book, it is relevant that it is close to the narratives of the Pentateuch, and specifically of Genesis in content and genre; it seems as if the impersonal narratological text has a claim to general acceptance. The ironic criticism it contains must be understood as part of the literary concept that makes it possible to identify the place of the book of Job in the literature of ancient Israel or in its culture. This can only be done within the context of text-pragmatic considerations and with regard to the discourses to which the biblical book of Job belongs.¹⁹

While literary irony flourished since the early modern period, there are instructive earlier examples. Ernst Behler mentions Chaucer in the “Canterbury Tales” in the Middle Ages and the “Metamorphoses” of Apuleius as well as the “True History” of Lucian of Samosata in ancient times.²⁰ Lucian’s work represents a new literary genre of satirical, critical texts, which explains very well that the people of Lucian’s time tried to ignore him during his lifetime²¹ and that he only became generally known in late antiquity.²² It seems to me that in his fictional trial “The Double Indictment” before the gods,²³ in which the author is sued by Rhetoric and Dialogue, we find a literary concept comparable to the prose frame of Job: Dike, the goddess of justice, addresses first the gods and then the horned Pan with the question of whether the people have been improved by the philosophers.²⁴ It represents a good deal of self-irony, but also an ironizing of the gods, when the author justifies himself against Rhetoric and Dialogue for composing satirical and ironic texts or dialogues. By being cleared by the majority in the council of gods,²⁵ he is placed in the company of and above the philosophers who were initially criticised by Dike and the other gods.

The discussion of irony belongs not only to the history of literature, but also to literary theory. It started in the Romantic period with Friedrich Schlegel.²⁶ Examples of the intensive use of irony in literature of the twentieth century can be found in the works of Thomas Mann and Robert Musil. Georg Lukács considered irony to be the basic concept of the novel, marking and addressing

19 Müller, *Ironie*, Introduction (without pages), considers both to be necessary to understand ironical utterances in literary contexts.

20 Cf. Ernst Behler, “Ironie,” *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* 4 (1998): 599–624, 608.

21 Cf. Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, “Lukian,” *Metzler-Lexikon antiker Autoren* (1997): 421–425, 422.

22 Nesselrath, “Lukian,” 424.

23 Text and translation: Austin M. Harmon, *Lucian III.: with an English translation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1929), 83–151.

24 Harmon, *Lucian*, 92–105.

25 See Harmon, *Lucian*, 144–151.

26 Bärbel Frischmann, “Ironie,” *Enzyklopädie Philosophie* 11 (1999): 665–669, 666–667.

its fictionality. In his view, irony emerges within the novel as “the highest freedom that can be achieved in a world without God.”²⁷ By those lights, literary irony could possibly be a means of philosophical and theological reflection in biblical texts as well, just as in the texts of Lucian.

2 The Ideal Pious Man in Misery

The righteous and God-fearing will prosper and flourish, unlike the wicked, whose fortunes will go to ruin. This is how Psalm 1, the programmatic text at the beginning of the psalms, describes the correlation between deed and consequence. Will Kynes has demonstrated in his study on intertextuality that the psalms played an essential role as reference for the poetry of Job.²⁸ Kynes does not limit his work merely to listing literary references, but in each case follows the interpretative context.²⁹ A contrasting relationship between Job and Psalm 1 is obvious, and it goes far beyond occasional links. Kynes sees an argumentative relationship, because the discrepancy between the sapiential rule and reality does not lead Job to reject the rule, but to accuse God.³⁰ Traditionally, God was responsible for the deed-consequence relationship, and God is now blamed for its violation. In the relationship of Job 22:18 and 23:10–12 with Psalm 1 in particular, as in the poetry of Job as a whole, it is not so much the question of innocent suffering that is reflected as the question of the continuation of the relationship with God, both on the side of the sufferer and on the side of God. The pious man, facing his suffering, senses a deficit of compassion, a lack of closeness of his God. The relationship, however, had to withstand lamentation and complaint.

Job is introduced in the prose frame as blameless, upright, fearing God, and turning away from evil, and he is confirmed by God as the most righteous person (Job 1:8). Therefore, the reader will expect for him the fate that Psalm 1, for example, anticipates for such a person. And the reader is not disappointed at first, for Job has already been presented with many offspring and much property. His experience thus matches cultural expectations for the righteous in deed and consequence. The entry of the *satan* into the scene and the focus on Job's perfection by God suggest a shift in the plot. The strange name of the

27 Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-Philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 93.

28 Will Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 180–181.

29 Kynes, *My Psalm*, 149–151.

30 Kynes, *My Psalm*, 184.

man אִיִּב, which alludes to the meaning “hated,” although he is introduced as a servant of God and blessed by God, already indicates the ironic distortion of the principle of deed and consequence as well as its theological foundations. Moreover, the excessive exaggeration in the description of Job’s character and good fortune is striking. Job is characterized twice with superlatives regarding his perfection as well as his wealth. As has long been remarked, hyperbole has functioned as a signal of irony in literary texts across many cultures.

In contrast to the narrative framework, the poetry of the book of Job also states from Job’s perspective that sin is possible.³¹ On this point, it is aligned with related texts from Mesopotamia and Egypt that blame the personal God for the neglect of the pious.³² The punishment Job suffers despite his intact relationship with God is thus regarded as unjustified and inadequate by Job in the poetic parts, and God is blamed for it. The secondary prose frame not only clarifies the background of Job’s protest, but also contrasts with Job’s attitude expressed in the poetry.

While the words of Job’s wife (2:9) appear to be exaggerated merely because of their brevity and lack of emotion, the attitude of Job, who remains almost silent and does not sever his relationship with God, is the opposite of what is to be expected. If one considers the importance of lament and complaint in the biblical literature, where they have an integral place in personal as well as collective religiosity, Job’s silent acceptance and his holding on to the God responsible for his suffering is another surprising turn of events. Job’s lament his complaint, his doubts as well as a call to God for salvation, would actually be a logical reaction to his suffering. But at first, the readers meet the theologically perfect sage, one who does not let himself be carried away by a word against the God of the world. Also, because of the heavenly scene that the readers know, his reaction is not to be expected. Job’s words and attitude do not appear justified. The perfectly pious believer, with his firm insistence on theological monotheism, appears as a tragic character. The scene is built up in such a way that the exaggerated piety of Job is extended and upheld until the moment of personal destruction.

Thus, on the basis of Job’s monotheistic confession, an atypical distance of the pious from the deity has been established, which is obviously intended as a counter-image to Job’s revolt in the poetry. The monotheistic confession is ironically contrasted to Job’s doubt, hopelessness, his wish to die, and his hope for an encounter with God in the poetry.

31 See Job 10; 13:26; cf. Heckl, *Hiob*, 78, 90.

32 Cf. Dorothea Sitzler, *Vorwurf gegen Gott: Ein religiöses Motiv im alten Orient* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1995); Heckl, *Hiob*, 212–216.

3 The Role of the Satan

Hermann Spieckermann argues that attributes and features of the *satan* character were transferred to God in the prose frame. Therefore, he speaks of a “Satanization” of God:

Die Satanisierung Gottes, Gottes willkürliche Sistierung der guten, von ihm selbst geschaffenen Ordnung, seine Preisgabe des Menschen wider alle menschlich vermeintlich gewußte Theo-Logik—das ist schon das Thema der Hiob-Novelle.³³

Spieckermann focuses on the temporal suspension of God’s salvific action and the abandonment of human beings to a power alien to God. Yet, this literary feature of the book of Job stands in sharp contrast to other biblical literature, which emphasizes God’s unfailing will to save. The prose framework is closely linked to this literature through quotations and allusions. Therefore, the introduction of the *satan* must be a literary ironizing of God. This is true although with the character of the *satan*, a figure is chosen from the divine court, which has its roots in mythology, to which the negative behavior of God is delegated.³⁴

The *satan* occurs only incidentally in the Hebrew Bible. The use of the character is probably related to popular religiosity, which clung to an antithesis to God as a reaction to radical monotheism. When we consider the divine council motif in Job 1–2 and Zechariah 3, a common mythical background³⁵ and a connection to similar ideas in Mesopotamia are visible.³⁶

It represents an ironizing of the monotheistic concept because the *satan* invalidates Job’s confessional statements (Job 1:21; 2:10) on the basis of his discourse with God himself: Job knows nothing of what is going on in heaven and of the fact that God has given him into the hands of a more or less independent power. Otherwise, one would have to regard his sentences as an ironic utterance on the character level. For neither would Job then have to accept the loss of everything he owned, nor would he have to accept the evil, since it does not

33 Hermann Spieckermann, “Die Satanisierung Gottes: Zur inneren Konkordanz von Novelle, Dialog und Gottesreden im Hiobbuch,” in *“Wer ist wie du, Herr, unter den Göttern?”: Studien zur Theologie und Religionsgeschichte Israels*, ed. Ingo Kottsieper (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 431–444, 436.

34 Heckl, *Hiob*, 372.

35 E. Theodore Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods: The Divine Council in Canaanite and Early Hebrew Literature* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980), 275–276.

36 *DDD*, 727.

come directly from God's hands. For the "omniscient reader," the basis of the theological concept that there is only one principle in the world is ironically called into question by the scene in heaven.

Of course, the appearance of the *satan* is at the same time a stylistic device when the character, which originates from popular religiosity and is connected to the mythical background of the worship of YHWH, is used to exempt YHWH for the will of salvation and for the good.³⁷ Thus, the *satan* can represent the negative non-salvific nature of YHWH and at the same time YHWH himself can ensure that Job is preserved (Job 1:12; 2:6).³⁸ What is ironized, however, is that God gives up his freedom because he renounces power and is engaged in a dubious gamble concerning the person who is devoted to him like no one else (see Job 1:8b). This casts doubts on monotheism, according to which YHWH alone is God of the world, and it is reminiscent of the ironic depictions of the interaction of the gods on Mount Olympus in Homer or in the above-mentioned text of Lucian.

If it is true that Job is a representative figure of Israel and its fate,³⁹ then the disaster he experiences and the temporary suspension of God's will for salvation continue only until Job's restoration. In my view, it is therefore no coincidence that the *satan* does not appear in the epilogue. If one looks closely at the speeches of the *satan* before God, it becomes clear that they are oaths: The character is vouching for his claim about Job with a conditional curse against himself. According to the dramatic plot of the narrative, this can only mean the end of the character who, with YHWH's permission, could bring disaster to Job and in Job exemplarily to Israel.⁴⁰

The role of the *satan* in this theologically charged narrative can be more precisely determined in comparison with the fourth vision of Zechariah (Zech 3), in which the *satan* also appears in a divine council vision. The scene is more concise, and the *satan* does not speak, but there too he seems to perform the role of the accuser. Unlike in the book of Job, however, it seems to be a more plausible⁴¹ court situation in which the *satan* becomes the accused instead of the accuser. The request to reproach the *satan*, probably addressed to YHWH by the interpreter-angel, is based on the fact that YHWH is about to elect Jerusalem (Zech 3:2aβ: יהוה בד השטן ויגער יהוה בד הבחר בירושלם "The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has chosen Jerusalem, rebuke

37 Heckl, *Hiob*, 372.

38 Heckl, *Hiob*, 370; idem, "Die Figur des Satans in der Rahmenerzählung des Hiobbuches," *leqach* 10 (2012): 45–57, 49.

39 Heckl, *Hiob*, 476–478.

40 Heckl, "Die Figur des Satans," 53.

41 In Job 1–2, it becomes a gambling scene.

you!") Thus, God seems to have already decided, so that an accusation of the high priest by the *satan* is out of the question.⁴² I suspect that it refers to the discourse on whether to continue to assemble exclusively for lamentation events and for repentance prayers, or whether to revive the pre-exilic celebration of the festivals in the sanctuary and the possibility of a cultic reconciliation, as it appears in Haggai, Zechariah, and Nehemiah.⁴³ While Zechariah 3 discusses a theological detail of the exilic/post-exilic period, Job ironizes the Deuteronomism at its theological root. The fact that the author of Job used the book of Zechariah, which has already been supplemented by Zechariah 3, can also be secured by the fact that the *satan*'s answer to YHWH's question where he comes from (Job 1:7b; 2:2b) seems to reflect the interpretation of the first vision of Zechariah (Zech 1:10). Altogether, the visions are dealing with the fate of the exile, with the re-election of Jerusalem and the hope of a change in Israel's history from political subjugation to salvation. All this could have inspired a historical-theological interpretation of the older poetic parts of the book of Job.

The *satan* as a dissociation of the non-salvific nature of God serves as a contrast for the strongly emphasized theological statements in Job 1:21 and Job 2:10. Job's monotheistic confession itself is not ironized here, because Job holds on to the relationship with God until the end. What is ironized is the origin of good and evil from God and its unquestioned acceptance. The narrative tries to show the problematic nature of such theological concepts. The message is: God's activity in history was ambiguous—he did not simply act according to the Deuteronomistic pattern, but nevertheless he was on the side of the pious, that is on the side of Israel. What remains here is the existence of the relationship of Job to God and vice versa. For God holds onto his relationship with Job just as much as Job does, who, according to the poetic parts of the book, achieves a deepened relationship with God. But on the level of the book, God's ambiguity ends and is removed only within an eschatological concept that includes the possibility of a cultic reconciliation, because in the end God's saving action on the one hand and his forgiveness on the other are valid for the future.

42 Rüdiger Lux, *Sacharja 1–8: übersetzt und ausgelegt* (Freiburg: Herder, 2019), 261.

43 According to Timo Veijola, the Deuteronomists emerged out of a Palestine movement centered on lament about the destruction of the temple. Cf. Veijola, *Verheissung in der Krise: Studien zur Literatur und Theologie der Exilszeit anhand des 89. Psalms* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedakatemia, 1982), 176, 190–198.

4 The Relationship to God vs. Fulfilment of the Commandments

At the request of the *satan* after YHWH's query, Job's relationship to God was examined and thus became an independent topic. The *satan*, in a reversal of the deed-consequence-nexus, claims that Job holds on to God because he is living under God's protection. What is a salvific relationship in the classical concept is here called into doubt by the *satan*. Deed and consequence are not supposed to play a role in the relationship to God on the side of humanity. This thesis formulates a different ideal of human beings' relationship to God.⁴⁴

The background of this theological thesis is probably the reversal of the deed-consequence-nexus, as it is lamented in the Joban poetry, for example in Job 21:7, according to which the wicked prosper and the pious suffer. Due to the intertextual relationship to the Pentateuch and Deuteronomy, the intention of this ironizing is evident. Certain features of Deuteronomy play an important role: These are its promises of salvation, which actually serve to motivate (Deut 28). All these aspects clearly link salvation or disaster to the observance or violation of a commandment for the community as well as the individual. This relationship is clear because of the literary connection between Job 2:7b and Deuteronomy 28:35.

In Deuteronomy, the disobedience of the people explains the disaster of the exile. It is a historical-theological concept. The fact that Job is hit with the curse of Deuteronomy and is actually considered a punished sinner destroys the motivations for fulfilling the commandments. Blessing cannot be acquired. What remains is the high status of the relationship to God itself, which was introduced by the *satan* and which is kept by Job despite the denial of the promises made by Deuteronomy.

The fulfilment of the commandments is indirectly under consideration with the attributes applied to Job in Job 1:1. The fulfilment of the commandments, however, is criticized, because the *satan* suggests that Job does not hold on to the fear of God in vain, but because he receives blessings from God. Job's perfection and his fear of God presuppose the fulfilment of the commandments, which is under suspicion of being oriented towards the acquisition of blessing. The observance of commandments should thus play no role as a form of the relationship to God. Paradigmatically, because the curse against God terminates the relationship according to Job 1:11; 2:5, 9 the observance of the first commandment⁴⁵ takes the place of keeping the commandments.

44 Cf. Heckl, *Hiob*, 474.

45 The first commandment according to the Jewish tradition, אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ "I am the LORD your God," deals with the relationship to God itself.

5 Ironical Criticism in Job's Confessions (Job 1:21; 2:10)

Several times I have pointed out the ironic relationship between the appearance of the *satan* and Job's confessions (Job 1:21; 2:10), which are called "Duldersprüche" ("words of the endurer") in German. The question arises whether the two theological confessions, despite the ironisation by the scene in heaven, can imply some kind of guidance for how to act in suffering. My Old Testament teacher, Rüdiger Lux, recently stated that this is precisely the case:

Dass mit der kollektiven Deutung Hiobs als Repräsentanzfigur die Ebene der individuellen Deutung in der Rahmenerzählung ausgeschlossen sei, weil diese keine 'Handlungsanweisungen für den Umgang mit dem Leiden' enthalte (so Heckl, *Die Figur des Satans*, 47), ist m.E. eine überzogene Schlussfolgerung. Gerade die Duldersprüche Hiobs in 1,21; 2,10 können und sollen sehr wohl auch als Handlungsanweisungen für das Verhalten des einzelnen Frommen im Leid verstanden werden. Wenn der Erzähler am individuellen Geschick Hiobs das kollektive Geschick Israels demonstriert, dann sind dabei immer beide Lektüreebenen im Spiel.⁴⁶

What I ruled out in my monograph on the basis of the historical-theological concept appears to be confirmed by the literary argumentation and the function of the confessions in the context: The prose frame is not an independent narrative, but has been created to introduce and complete the older poetry. In the completed book, the theological confessions by Job make sense because they demonstrate that he unquestionably holds on to his relationship with God in spite of the heavenly reality. However, they are not expressions of a pious attitude or of endurance but confessions, and Job does not stop there. After his protest, his accusation against God follows God's words and Job's comfort because of his encounter with God, which brings him very close to this God. The Joban poetry, which offers an answer neither to the question of the nexus between deed and consequence nor to the question of the origins of suffering, shows what the ideal of the relationship with God can look like. Thus, 40 chapters of vivid confrontation with the subject of the relationship to God are presented, these serving as a confirmation of Job's relationship to God. If anything can provide guidance for how to speak in suffering, it is the

⁴⁶ Rüdiger Lux, "Hat auch der Satan seine Zeit?: Zur Niederlage des Widersachers JHWHs in Sacharja 3 und Hiob 1–2," in *Nichts Neues unter der Sonne?: Zeitvorstellungen im Alten Testament*, ed. Jens Kotjatko-Reeb, Benjamin Ziemer, and Stefan Schorch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 293–316, 306.

confrontation of God in lament and accusation and the encounter with God in prayer. The confessions appear as ironized by the scene in heaven. This ironizing does not serve to explain the ambiguity of God which is virulent in monotheism or to give the people a monotheistic confession as an answer in their suffering. The irony of the confession in its present context serves to deal with the ambiguity of God in the past. Since this happens in a historical-theological concept, it occurs in the hope of a future time in which God is One and at the same time is completely committed to the salvation of his people.

6 The Ironizing of the Deuteronomistic Theology of History

The secondary framing and the resulting modification of the plot change the place of the poetic text by establishing a new literary context. The closeness of Job's utterances to statements of Deutero-Isaiah and the use of formulations of the Deuteronomistic literature and Deuteronomy suggest that the context of the framed book is now the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy, and the Deuteronomistic historical books. All of these books are testimonies of the emerging monotheism in Judaism.

Many of these contexts contain historical accounts. Several partially literal quotations from the beginning of the first book of Samuel and correspondences of the content between the fate of Job and that of Eli and his sons indicate that Job was intended to be placed alongside the Deuteronomistic historical books.⁴⁷ Another context is supplied by the ancestor narratives. Because of his age and the milieu, Job is placed side by side with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁴⁸

The Job of the poetic parts is a God-fearing non-Israelite who first meets the God of Israel within the divine speeches. Unlike the readers, he does not know Him by name, although at the end, after the divine speeches, he testifies that he has come face to face with the one he previously knew only as a whisper (Job 42:5). The prose frame is quite different: Job as an example of integrity makes confessions to YHWH that could do honor to Deutero-Isaiah (cf. Isa 45:7). Job 1:21 and 2:10 are theological statements in the spirit of monotheism. Moreover, Job addresses YHWH as his God by name.

In Job, the Deuteronomistic history of 1 Samuel 1–2 Kings 25 is imitated. The relationship of the two texts to each other is, according to Gérard Genette's

47 Heckl, *Hiob*, 392–429.

48 Cf. Heckl, *Hiob*, 377–380; Schmid, *Hiob als Buch*, 65.

concept, that of hypertextuality,⁴⁹ which he also calls transformation or imitation.⁵⁰ While the Deuteronomistic history results in destruction, which is to be understood as a punishment, Job's story is meant to be understood as an ironizing of the concept of guilt and punishment in history. Both the possibility of guilt and the necessity of punishment are questioned.

That in the end it must really be God himself who is also responsible for disaster is a consequence of monotheism. That in the frame narrative someone who is without sin falls into disaster with God's direct involvement is an ironizing of the hope in the God who sees the suffering and is on the side of the pious. Moreover, because the book places Job's integrity at the beginning, it intensifies the problem as would happen in a halakhic discussion.

It is a literary ironizing because it does not simply question the Deuteronomistic concept. Rather, the concept of Deuteronomism becomes contrasted with the wisdom concept of lament, accusation, and prayer, as well as the possibility of God's encounter with the one lamenting or praying. Deuteronomism made the observance of the commandments the key in explaining the exile. The consequence of this was that the Deuteronomic law lost its practicability besides its historical theological use because an individual violation of commandments already would lead, presumably, to collective disaster. In the book of Job, as a synthesis the relationship to God becomes most important, which was ironically raised by the *satan*, who acts as a theological corrective, but at the same time made the sufferings a temporary questioning of God's will of salvation.

7 Summary

The narrative framework of the Book of Job brings the subject of the poem to a climax, as it is commonly done in the halakhic midrash. Thus, the example of a blameless, perfectly pious man who was thrown put into the deepest suffering was chosen. The exaggeration ironically inverts the nexus of deed and consequence, which, according to the *satan*, works in reverse, since the pious person only holds on to God because he is receiving blessing. Job as the main character keeps to the monotheistic confession against the background of the scene in heaven, which he does not know and in spite of the disaster. Both makes him appear as a tragic hero. The confession to the One God, which

49 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 5.

50 See Genette, *Palimpsests*, 5–6.

substitutes the plea for salvation and lamentation, but also accusation by the sufferer, is thus ironized. This ironic substitution serves to mediate between monotheism and elements of the traditional piety (lament, accusation, despair, and prayer), that Job presents in the poem.

That YHWH gives up divine freedom and power to the *satan* ironizes the universal theological concept that there is only one principle in the world. The unity of God is suspended in the story, but eschatologically renewed by the disappearance of the *satan*.

The most important intertextual discourse evident in the book of Job is the one with the Deuteronomistic historical literature. Job as an example of a faithful Israel is placed in opposition to the association of the disaster in the history (exile) and with the disobedience and guilt of the people. Thus, the book of Job contains a deep theological self-irony that is directed against the theological position of Deuteronomism and uses traditional religious elements for corrective purposes.

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Not Parody, but Irony: Irony in the Book of Job

JiSeong J. Kwon

Some researchers have argued the book of Job is a parody of an existing text, tradition, or genre, and that the genre of Job is solely a parody.¹ In particular, Katharine Dell argues that the author of Job misuses the hymnic genre and parodies specific texts of Psalms; e.g., (1) Job 7:11–21; 14:1–12; Psalm 8; (2) Job 9:5–10, 25–28; 10:8–12; Psalm 139; (3) Job 21:7–13; (4) Job 23:8–9; Psalm 23,² so that seeing its genre as parody is an appropriate analysis for the evaluation of the genre of Job.³ Certainly, the message of psalmic hymns concerning the greatness and mystery of divinity in the world seems to be sarcastically presented in the speeches of Job (e.g., 9:4–13; 12:7–25; 14:18–22). However, the speeches hardly distort the messages of the psalmic hymns by imitating existing texts of Psalms, whether in an earnest or a sarcastic sense. In the most general sense, the author of Job's speeches could have known general psalmic forms and their

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- 1 Katharine J. Dell, *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1991); Will Kynes, *My Psalm Has Turned into Weeping: Job's Dialogue with the Psalms* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012). Edward L. Greenstein, "Parody as a Challenge to Tradition: The Use of Deuteronomy 32 in the Book of Job," in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 66–78, claims that the author of Job utilizes Deuteronomy 32 for the purpose of parody. William Whedbee, "Comedy of Job," *Semeia* 7 (1977): 1–39, sees the book of Job as a comedy having humorous elements, which is close to a sort of parody; similar to this, see Abigail Pelham, "Job as Comedy, Revisited," *JSOT* 35.1 (2010): 89–112. Also see Catherine Keller, "'Recesses of the Deep': Job's Comic-Cosmic Epiphany," in *The Face of the Deep* (London: Routledge, 2002), 124–140; Virginia Ingram, "The Book of Job as a Satire with Mention of Verbal Irony," *St. Mark's Review* 239.1 (2017): 51–62. However, it is hard to know whether readers of Job could have understood Job's speeches in tremendous agony as having tragedy and humor at the same time.
 - 2 However, Dell, *Book of Job*, 147–148 does not adequately develop those occasions of parody from corresponding texts.
 - 3 Dell argues that "this kind of parody is a literary technique which developed outside 'wisdom' and outside the influence of Egyptian literature (in which parody is not found)" (*Book of Job*, 152–153). However, skeptical and ironic features in it are not far from the Egyptian instruction genre and other subsidiary texts; even some of the proverbial maxims in Proverbs 10–29 could have ironic and contradictory sense. See JiSeong J. Kwon, "Scribal Intertexts in the Book of Job: Foreign Counterparts of Job," in *Scribalism in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Johannes U. Ro (Berlin: De Gruyter, in preparation).

intrinsic messages and utilized them in his discourse, but it is not accurate to call this literary technique a “parody” of psalmic texts. Instead, the notion of “irony” is utilized in the dialogic part of Job.⁴ In several efforts to define the muddy term “irony”—verbal irony, allusive irony, situational irony, rhetorical irony, dramatic irony—Linda Hutcheon explains this term as follows:

While it may come into being through the semantic playing off of the stated against the unstated, irony is a “weighted” mode of discourse in the sense that it is asymmetrical, unbalanced in favor of the silent and the unsaid.⁵

Similarly, Douglas Muecke, dismissing an old definition of irony, claims that “irony is saying something in a way that activates not one but an endless series of subversive interpretations.”⁶ According to Hutcheon and Muecke, “irony” seems to be seen as an open interlocution, not as a closed dialogue,⁷ and this is quite distinctive from the notion of “parody.” While parody primarily aims at mocking or burlesquing the specific statement or view of a target individual,

4 Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1965), 202–240; James G. Williams, “You Have Not Spoken Truth of Me: Mystery and Irony in Job,” *ZAW* 83.2 (1971): 231–255; David A. Robertson, “Book of Job: A Literary Study,” *Soundings* 56.4 (1973): 446–469; Gregory W. Parsons, “Literary Features of the Book of Job,” *BSac* 138.551 (1981): 215–218; Yair Hoffman, “The Relation between the Prologue and the Speech-Cycles in Job: A Reconsideration,” *VT* 31.2 (1981): 160–170; “Irony in the Book of Job,” *Immanuel* 17 (1983): 7–21; Aaron Lichtenstein, “Irony in the Book of Job,” *Dor Le Dor* 13.1 (1984): 41–46; Michael A. Fishbane, “The Book of Job and Inner-Biblical Discourse,” in *The Voice from the Whirlwind: Interpreting the Book of Job*, ed. Leo G. Perdue and W. Clark Gilpin (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1992), 86–98; Yair Hoffman, *A Blemished Perfection: The Book of Job in Context* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 212–221; Dirk Geeraerts, “Caught in a Web of Irony: Job and His Embarrassed God,” in *Job 28: Cognition in Context*, ed. Ellen J. van Wolde (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 37–55; Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 187–239; Naphtali S. Meshel, “Whose Job Is This?: Dramatic Irony and Double Entendre in the Book of Job,” in *The Book of Job: Aesthetics, Ethics, Hermeneutics*, ed. Leora Batnitzky and Ilana Pardes (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 47–76; David R. Jackson, “Cosmic Bully or God of Grace?: The Book of Job as Māšāl,” *WTJ* 78.1 (2016): 65–73; Tobias Häner, “Job’s Dark View of Creation: On the Ironic Allusions to Genesis 1:1–2:4a in Job 3 and their Echo in Job 38–39,” *OTE* 33.2 (2020).

5 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony’s Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 37.

6 Douglas C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic* (London: Methuen, 1982), 31.

7 See Tobias Häner, “Making Fun of the Suffering, or of God? Irony in the Book of Job” (presented at the OSU, unpublished paper, 2018), 2–3.

irony does not necessarily present the opposite statement against the counterpart's thought or view, although giving a subversive connotation without conscious reference.⁸

1 Irony or Parody?

In the book of Job, two types of irony can be observed: (1) verbal irony and (2) situational irony.⁹ In the dialogic part of Job (Job 3–41), verbal irony discloses many conflicting voices concerning their claims on the moral universe between given characters (Job, his three friends, Elihu, and YHWH) and shows contradictory views on the issue of suffering between protagonists and readers (e.g., Deuteronomic ideology in early Judaism). Then, the most dominant situational irony designed by its author(s) could be derived from the fact that readers in its prose-tale are aware of the cause of Job's suffering, whereas Job, his friends, and Elihu do not know why such a disaster occurred. The unawareness of the protagonists makes them present their thoughts of divine order which are ultimately condemned by YHWH. This forms a structurally ironic context. When, among Job's speeches, "irony" occurs between Job and his three friends (Job 3–31), the author would appear to adopt hymnic forms and concerns to denunciate the friends and YHWH in terms of the innocent suffering and moral disorder, but there is no evidence of a parody of a particular and traceable text. Indeed, as I argue, the book of Job is most probably comprehended in an ironic sense. However, the question is whether Job's texts specifically intend to mock hymns in Psalms or views of psalmic praise. By analyzing several texts of the dialogue of Job, this essay will concentrate on why the dialogic part of Job's speeches should not be seen as the case of parody but should be approached as the broad irony of prevalent hymnic form. Firstly, I will state why the dominant genre of Job cannot be a parody of specific texts of Psalms. Secondly, I will shortly examine two possible instances of parody: (1) Job 9, Psalm 104; (2) Job 7:11–21; 15:14–16; Psalm 8.

8 Of course, it is not precise to say "irony" and "parody" are separate entities as there are overlappings between them; sometimes "parody" can be used in the form of irony alongside the genre of satire. See Douglas C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), 55–92.

9 According to Yair Hoffmann they could be classified as follows: (1) irony between given characters (Job, his friends, readers); (2) irony between author(s) and protagonists; (3) irony between author(s) and readers (ironic situation); (4) irony between author(s) and his works. See Hoffmann, "Irony in the Book of Job," 12.

2 Why the Genre of Job Is Not a Parody

While Dell discusses the difficulty of determining the dominant genre of Job because of the diversity of genres, she supposes that its author is “stepping outside literary conventions to make a protest” and that Job “is characterized by a deliberate misuse, or improper use, of the genre.”¹⁰ In considering the book of Job as a composite of different genres, Dell argues that the primary genre of Job is the parody that functions as mocking original genres (Psalm 8, 21; 139).¹¹ Her insightful suggestion might be acceptable in explaining the tone of its dialogic part, but seeing Job’s genre as a parody is overly exaggerated.

Simon Dentith mentions that the definition of “parody” should contain the sense of “polemical” with “the contentious or ‘attacking’ mode in which parody can be written.”¹² He highlights the significance of “parody as *rejoinder*, or mocking response to the word of another” saying that “many parodies draw on the authority of precursor texts to attack, satirise.”¹³ Thus, if “parody” in a given text is established, it should have the following features: (1) “the allusive imitation” of “the precursor text”; (2) the mocking, polemical, or attacking mode of the parodied text. Then, does the claim of Job’s parody over Psalms satisfy those conditions?

Firstly, what one needs to confirm concerning “parody” is whether the corresponding author of Job intends to imitate the original work, i.e. specific texts within the Psalms. Will Kynes, for instance, argues that the author of Job 12:21, 24 parodies Psalm 107:40 to mock Eliphaz’s speech.¹⁴ Although part of Job 12 is similar to Psalm 107:40, one may not deny another possibility: both texts may depend on a shared hymn and (more reasonably) Job 12:13–25 sarcastically¹⁵ responds to Job 5:17–26, where Eliphaz states that the one whom God reproves will be delivered and blessed.¹⁶ Essentially, it is more realistic to view such

10 Dell, *Book of Job*, 148.

11 Dell, *Book of Job*, 148.

12 Simon Dentith, *Parody*. (London: Routledge, 2000), 9.

13 “Parody includes any cultural practice which provides a relatively polemical allusive imitation of another cultural production or practice” (Dentith, *Parody*, 9).

14 Kynes, *My Psalm*, 80–81, 89–91. Also, see Dell, *Book of Job*, 129; David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, WBC 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989), 287; Choon Leong Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 626–628.

15 It is difficult to determine whether sarcasm is a form of irony or not. I suppose that sarcasm is not directly concerned with a type of irony, but an ironical situation could be seen in a sarcastic way.

16 Robert Gordis, *The Book of Job: Commentary, New Translation and Special Studies* (New York: JTSA, 1978), 139; Edwin M. Good, *In Turns of Tempest: Reading of Job, with a Translation* (Stanford: Stanford University, 1998), 235; Roger N. Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 73.

similarities of Job with psalmic texts as the spread of a broad intellectual network in its compositional period rather than as a quotation, an allusion, or an echo in a narrow sense. If the author of Job borrows from Psalm 107, the form of hymn poetry that people generally recognize at the time should be strengthened in its given dialogue of Job 12. However, Job 12:13–24, in general, highlights that the destructive power of the divinity dismantles the power and wisdom of political governors and leaders of all nations without any purpose.

Secondly, we may ask to what extent Job's speech contains a certain level of mockery, making the opposite party—his friends and God—his enemies. Without any doubt, as Job wishes to know the cause of his suffering, it is improbable that Job in his hymnic statement regards his deity as an enemy,¹⁷ but rather earnestly seeks to encounter him for his vindication. Also, when forms of instruction (Job 12:7–12) and hymn (12:13–25) are used in supporting his innocence, Job by no means forsakes his faith and piety in YHWH, although his ironic tone might be seen as a form of protest. Furthermore, another question is whether one could affirm that the author of Job's speech disparages or caricatures authors of Psalms and their ideology. Does the author of Job's speech specifically indicate the delusion of the book of Psalms by parodying it? While Job's dialogue forms the newly generated content and situation beyond the typical form of a hymn and an instruction, Job still acknowledges God's sovereign power over the world as well as his deliverance and the fragility of humanity (7:7; 13:16; 14:1–6), so there is no clue of such an opposition to the ideology of Psalms.

17 Without doubt, expressions concerning Job's physical and mental suffering are relevant to the metaphorical imagery of the divine attack and brutality in Job 7:11–21; 9:17–19; 10:3, 16; 16:6–17; 19:6–12, 21; 30:19–20, so that some might maintain that Job regards his deity as an enemy. However, those imageries are merely used for claiming the vindication of Job's innocence and calling for the encounter with his deity. See Edward L. Greenstein, "Metaphors of Illness and Wellness in Job," in *"When the Morning Stars Sang": Essays in Honor of Choon Leong Seow on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*, ed. Scott C. Jones and Christine R. Yoder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), 39–50; Katharine J. Dell, "What Was Job's Malady?," *JOT* 41 (2016): 61–77; JiSeong J. Kwon, "Psychosomatic Approach to Job's Body and Mind: Based on Somatic Symptom Disorder," *JORH* 59.4 (2020): 2032–2044. In Job 28, the sufferer confesses that he will submit to his deity in the pious religious attitude (28:28) and at last his speeches with regard to justice were considered as "what was right" (42:7–9); YHWH's reproach in 40:8–14 is aimed at the misunderstanding of Job's personal justice (chs. 29–31) and the ignorance of the divine blueprint (38:2).

3 Parody in Job 9 and Psalm 104?

Dell argues that Job 9:5–10 parodies Psalm 104 with Amos 5:6–9.¹⁸ Christian Frevel also claims that author(s) of Job were aware of relevant psalms and Psalm 104 “has to be considered unambiguously a hypertext or subtext in Job based on the accumulation of implicit allusions, catchwords and structural parallels.”¹⁹ However, it is hardly possible to indicate that the author(s) of Job had a specific intention to satirize or to oppose the concern of Psalm 104; its psalmic expressions appear in different contexts and meaning from the speeches of Job, Elihu, and YHWH. First of all, Psalm 104, classified as a “praise psalm”²⁰ or “a personal and communal hymn,”²¹ talks about the greatness of YHWH as Creator over all creation and seems to follow “Egyptian hymnic tradition.”²² The introductory part in vv. 2–4 praises the majesty of YHWH in six hymnic participles, YHWH’s creation of the earth, the water, living creatures, and the heavenly beings are presented in vv. 5–23, the psalmist praises the wonderous work of the Sustainer and exalts the wisdom of the Provider in vv. 24–30, and finally elements of “wish” for the divine glory, the “vow” to praise God, the “imprecation” to sinners, and the “summon to praise” God in vv. 31–35 are indicated.²³

Although rejecting the intentional allusion between Psalm 104 and Job 9:5–6, Frevel insists that “the allusions in Job 9:6–9 are following the praise of the creational power of God in Ps 104.”²⁴ However, there is little evidence that the allusion is to Psalm 104. Firstly, Frevel assumes that expressions “stretching out heavens” and “speaking to the sun, and it does not shine, sealing up the stars” in Job 9:7–8 alludes to Psalm 104:2 (“covering yourself with light as with a garment, stretching out the heavens like a tent”). While Frevel’s evaluation in the first cycle of Job’s speech is careful, the phrase *לְבַדּוֹ נִטָּה שָׁמַיִם* (“who stretched out the heavens alone”) in Job 9:8a appears only in Isaiah 44:24 (slightly

18 Dell, *Book of Job*, 127.

19 Christian Frevel, “Telling the Secrets of Wisdom: The Use of Psalm 104 in the Book of Job,” in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J. Dell and Will Kynes (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 159.

20 Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms. Vol. 3* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2011), 245.

21 Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 2, and Lamentations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 226.

22 Erhard Gerstenberger, “Theologies in the Book of Psalms,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 618.

23 Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 2*, 221.

24 Frevel, “Use of Psalm 104,” 160.

changed) within the Hebrew Bible.²⁵ Also, God's destructive power shaking mountains, the earth, and its pillars in Job 9:5–6 is followed by the darkening of sun and stars in Job 9:7. Besides, the motif of the disorder of the world and the divine wrath frequently appears in Isaiah 13:10, 13 and Psalm 18:8–10.²⁶

עטה-אור בשלמה **נוטה שמים** כיריעה

covering yourself with light as with a garment, *stretching out the heavens* like a tent.

Ps 104:2

נוטה שמים לבדו ודורך על-במתי ים

The one alone stretching out the heavens and treading on the back of Yam.

Job 9:8

כה-אמר יהוה גאלך ויצרך מבטן אנכי יהוה עשה כל **נוטה שמים לבדי** רקע הארץ (מי)
[אתי] ²⁷

Thus YHWH—your redeemer and your shaper from the womb—says: “I am YHWH, the Maker of all things, *stretching out the heavens alone*, treading the earth [by myself] (who is beside me?).”

Isa 44:24

If the author of Job is parodying Psalm 104, what the author doubts should be the belief about the deliverance of the Creator, and the author of Job 9 should intend to disclose the propaganda of the Psalms. However, nowhere does the author of Job 9 mention YHWH's creative power for deliverance. The

25 Robert H. Pfeiffer, “The Dual Origin of Hebrew Monotheism,” *JBL* 46 (1927): 203; Ralph Elliott, “A Comparative Study of Deutero Isaiah and Job” (PhD, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1956), 196; Samuel L. Terrien, “Quelques Remarques Sur Les Affinités de Job Avec Le Deutéro-Esaïe,” in *Volume Du Congrès, Genève, 1965* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 302; Christina L. Brinks, “Job and Deutero Isaiah: The Use and Abuse of Traditions,” *BiblInt* 20 (2012): 412–413; JiSeong J. Kwon, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality: Literary and Historical Relationships between Job and Deutero-Isaiah* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), 62.

26 Georg Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963), 205; Clines, *Job* 1–20, 229–230.

27 There are two choices: **מי אתי** (K; “who was with me?”; 1QIs^a [מיא אתי], 4QIs^b, and Hebrew MSS; LXX, Aq, Vg) and **מאתי** (Q; “by myself”; Tg, Syr). There is no reason to put an interrogative at the end of this sentence. So the translation here uses Q in MT; John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34–66*, WBC 25 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 693; John Goldingay, *Isaiah 40–55: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, ed. David Payne, ICC 1 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 9–10.

nuance regarding the content of the created world (Job 9:9–10) is irrelevant to the account of the praise of extraordinary works in the universe. However, God's wonderful works serve to indicate divine enmity against an innocent sufferer and purposefully tell how much God's act works for unfair violence. Therefore, rather than a parody of the specific text of Psalm 104, it would be regarded as a sort of general ironizing of God's restraining power, although its nuance could sound a little sarcastic.

Most significantly, if Job's editor intends to aim sarcastic mockery at the theology of Psalms, he should be consistent regarding this. However, if Psalm 104 was intentionally employed in different discourses of Job's dialogic part, the ideology of Psalm 104 should have been mocked or opposed by its author in the same tone. As Frevel noticed here, the relationship of Job 24 with Psalm 104 is contradictory—(1) Job 24:5 (Job 15:23); Psalm 104:23; (2) Job 24:5; Psalm 104:11; (3) Job 24:6–7; Psalm 104:23—and there God is accused by the voice of Job, and finally Elihu's speech in Job 34:14–15 most likely takes up the position of Psalm 104:29, 30a to defend God's righteous deed. In YHWH's speech, Frevel argues the literary reference of Job 38–41 to Psalm 104 (esp. Ps 104:21; Job 39:29) that describes the sustaining force of creation. Even though the author of Job, according to Frevel, makes “neither acceptance nor rejection, rather dialogue and argumentation” with Psalm 104,²⁸ if Job's dialogue has no consistent reaction to the thought of Psalm 104 to mock the theology of the psalm, it is misleading to presuppose that diachronic links of Job's text with Psalm 104 result from a parody.

4 Parody in Job 7 and Psalm 8?

4.1 *Job 7:17–18 and Psalm 8:5*

A similar argument could be observed in Job 7:17–18 and Psalm 8:5. In this instance, Job 7:17 is considered to be a parody of Psalm 8:5.²⁹ Kynes is

²⁸ Frevel, “Use of Psalm 104,” 167.

²⁹ Gordis, *Job*, 82 proposes that Job 7:17 parodies Ps 8:5, 6. See Good, *Tempest*, 216; Whybray, *Job*, 56; Kynes, *My Psalm*, 63–67; Ingram, “Book of Job as a Satire,” 55; Edward L. Greenstein, *Job: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), 32, note 34. For similarities between Psalm 8 and Job, see Johannes Hempel, “Mensch und König: Studie zu Psalm 8 und Hiob,” *FF* 35 (1961): 119–23. In contrast to this, see Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, “Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17–18: A Mistaken Scholarly Commonplace?,” in *The World of the Aramaeans Biblical Studies in Honour of Paul-Eugène Dion*, ed. P. M. Michèle Daviau, John W. Wevers, and Michael Weigl (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 205–15; George W. Coats, “Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas,” *JBL* 89.1 (1970): 14–26; Helmut Schnieringer, *Psalm 8: Text—Gestalt—Bedeutung*, ÄAT 59 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), 432–433.

convinced of the parody of Psalm 8:5; he points out that substantial lexical similarities hint at a literary allusion between the two texts, and rather than using a typical formula or tradition, the poet of Job 7:17–18 parodies the earlier text.³⁰ Nonetheless, Kynes' claim founders for lack of evidence, except for linguistic similarities.

In Psalm 8:2–10, the poet praises the glorious work of Creator over the earth and his name (8:2–3, 10), and exalts YHWH as a deity who cares for and intervenes in the lives of human beings, though they are merely insignificant mortals (vv. 5). Why then, although YHWH is the majestic Creator, has he made mortals and “crowned” them with “glory and majesty” (כבוד והדר), giving them dominion over all the creatures in vv. 6–7? The psalmist's recognition concerning the human-centered world and humanity's being like divinity strongly echoes the creation of humankind according to the likeness of the divinity in Genesis 1:26–27, 28–30.³¹ On the contrary, the context of Job 7:17–18, where Job in suffering protests against God's torment (7:11–16) and rejects excessive attention from his deity (vv. 17–21), is quite distinctive.

Job 7:17–18

Psalm 8:5

מה־אנוש כי תגדלנו וכי־תשית
אליו לבך

וּתְפַקְדֵנוּ לְבַקְרִים לְרֹגְעִים תִּבְחַנֵּנוּ¹⁸

מה־אנוש כי־תזכרנו ובן־אדם כי תפקדנו

¹⁷ *What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your heart on him,*

¹⁸ *instruct him every morning and test him every moment.*

What is man that you should remember him, and (what is) the son of man that you should instruct him?

Here, there are several linguistic resemblances between Job 7:17–18 and Psalm 8:5. Firstly, the phrase “what is man that ...” (מה־אנוש כי) occurs in both texts (also, Job 15:14). Secondly, the verb “instruct him” (תפקדנו) is commonly repeated. Thirdly, setting “heart” (לב) on humanity in Job 7:17b is reminiscent of “you are mindful of him” (תזכרנו) in Psalm 8:5.

But “the man” in Job 7:17–18 is set in contrast to the chaotic and mythical beings such as ים (“Sea”) and תנין (“dragon” 7:12), which are opponents of

³⁰ Kynes, *My Psalm*, 65–66.

³¹ Ross, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 289; Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, *Psalms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 59.

God; “the man” indicates a transient being like רוח (“wind”) and הבל (“breath” 7:7, 16). Job’s plea is that his deity would let his shattered life end, but God’s relentless mindfulness frustrates Job’s wish for imminent death. Thus, Job’s lament is not about the bright exaltation of the deity in Psalm 8 but about his personal indictment of God. In addition, as though God’s mindfulness (תזכרנו) and instruction (תפקדנו) of humanity in Psalm 8 similarly corresponds to Job 7:18a, the occasion in Job is hardly concerned with the context of the creation account in Genesis 1, but rather is related to the divine brutality toward an individual in Job 7:19–20.

More significantly, what the common formula of the two texts (מה-אנוש כי) itself implies is not different, although their contexts of the formula are distinctive. For instance, George Coats earlier claimed that variants of the formula מה-אנוש כי connote “the self-abasement” or “the insult,” and it appears in many places in the Hebrew Bible (Ps 8:5; 144:3; Job 6:11; 7:17; 15:14; 21:15); its structure is easily found in “five of the Lachish letters” and “Amarna letters.”³² Then, Coats argues that just as God’s treatment, instruction, and testing in Job 7:17–18 indicates divine punishment against human beings, Psalm 8:5 likewise “does not present an admiring grateful response to God’s visit, but suggests, because of man’s nature in comparison to the rest of creation” (Ps 8:6–9), “that God should not visit him.”³³ Namely, if the formula in Psalm 8:5 (“what is man that you should remember him, and the son of man that you should visit him”) would already have the sense of “accusation” and “punishment,” there is nothing in Job 7:17–18 to parody the viewpoint of Psalm 8:5. Following Coats’s view, Raymond van Leeuwen argues that the claim that Job 7:17–18 is a parody of Psalm 8:5 should be dismissed since the lexical formula is “stereotypical, with free variations” and should most likely be comprehended as “literary adaptations still standing close to a living, oral formula.”³⁴

Then, one needs to consider the viewpoint of humanity in Job 7:17–18, which has more reasonable homogeneity with Psalm 144:3–4³⁵ than Psalm 8:5–7³⁶ (cf. also Ps 90:2–12; Prov 30:2–4; Eccl 3:18–21). For instance, Van Leeuwen

32 Coats, “Self-Abasement,” 15–16.

33 Coats, “Self-Abasement,” 25.

34 Van Leeuwen, “Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17–18,” 210.

35 Klaus D. Seybold, “Zur Geschichte des vierten Davidpsalters (Pss 138–145),” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller (Leiden: Brill, 2005), comments: “Die Beobachtung, dass die irgend eines sakralen Vergehens beschuldigten Psalmisten in ihren Gebeten offensichtlich traditionelle Rechtgläubigkeit an den Tag legen, mag mit ihrer Verteidigung zu tun haben und ist aus der konkreten Situation verständlich” (388).

36 See Coats, “Self-Abasement”; Van Leeuwen, “Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17–18”; among commentaries cf. Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob*, 180; John Gray, *Book of Job*, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2010), 181; Seow, *Job 1–21*, 498.

supposes that since the word **הבל** in Psalm 144:4 is repeated in Job 7:16 (cf. v. 7) to highlight the futility of life and the phrase **מה־אנוש** in Job 7:17a is exchanged to **מה־אדם** and **בן־אנוש** in Psalm 144:3, Job 7 is much closer to Psalm 144.³⁷

3 יהוה **מה־אדם** ותדעוהו **בן־אנוש** ותחשבהו 4 אדם להבל דמה ימיו כצל עובר

³ O YHWH, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you consider him? ⁴ Man is like a breath. His days are like a passing shadow.

Ps 144:3–4

In Psalm 144:1–4 (cf. Psalm 18) as a royal psalm, the poet recognizes the marvelous work of YHWH as a warrior to protect and deliver him in vv. 1–2. Then, the formula “what is man” (**מה־אנוש**) in Job 7:17a is exchanged to **מה־אדם** and **בן־אנוש** in Psalm 144:3, and the *hebel* of human beings in Psalm 144:4 also appears in Job 7:16. Different from the context of Psalm 8, the contrast between YHWH’s might power in the universe, and the triviality of humankind in Psalm 144 is reflected here. Psalm 144:3–4 has no emphasis on human lordship and dominion over the world, but it is noted that humans are too futile to be worthy of divine care. Again, the shared expression (“What is man ...”) in v. 3 denotes the self-abasement for humankind.

4.2 *Job 15:14–16 and Psalm 8:5*

Next, it has been often argued that Eliphaz’s speech in Job 15:14–16 is a parody of Psalm 8 (Ps 8:5; Job 15:14).³⁸ Kynes, for instance, claims:

Eliphaz seems to recognise that Job is not rejecting the psalmist’s high view of humanity but actually using his parody of Psalm 8 to accuse God of not bestowing on him the royal place it describes, because he responds with a parody of his own, in which he denies Job this possibility.³⁹

Nevertheless, except for the common idiom **מה־אנוש כי**, Job 15:14–16 does not display any parallels with the hymn of Psalm 8:5, where undeserved human beings are the object of divine care. Eliphaz in 15:1–13 disputes Job’s empty

37 Van Leeuwen, “Psalm 8.5 and Job 7.17–18,” 210–211.

38 John G. Janzen, *Job* (Louisville: Westminster, 1986), 117; Good, *Tempest*, 243; Fishbane, “Book of Job and Inner-Biblical Discourse,” 93; Kynes, *My Psalm*, 71–73. Good notices that Job 15:14 “alludes to Job’s parody in 7.17 of Psalm 8 and the divine attention to humans” (243); however, he does not make a strict distinction between parody and irony.

39 Kynes, *My Psalm*, 71.

argumentation that he is innocent and corrects his imprudent witness and misbehavior to God (vv. 2–4), rebuking him for his attack on the friends' advice (vv. 7–13). Then, Eliphaz condemns the moral defectiveness and corruption of humans (vv. 14–16), who “drink injustice like water (אִישׁ־שֹׁתָה כַּמֵּיִם) (עוֹלָה)” (v. 16), by which he indirectly censures Job, who attempts to vindicate himself regarding disasters from God. The question of Job 15:14—“What is man, that he can be clean? Or what is one who is born of a woman, that he can be just?”—is connected to the prophetic vision in Eliphaz's first speech of Job 4:17, saying that humans cannot be “righteous” and “pure” “before God” (מֵאֱלֹהִים...מֵעֲשָׂהוּ). Also, concerning the untrustworthiness and impurity of human beings, קִדְשֵׁי (“his holy ones”) and שָׁמַיִם (“heavens”) in Job 15:15 corresponds to עֲבָדָיו (“his servants”) and מַלְאֲכָיו (“his angels”) in Job 4:18, where human acts which are in no way blameless before the Creator are mentioned. Indeed, the subject-matter of Job 15:14 is no more than the impurity and morality (צַדִּיק, זָכָה) of human beings that will lead to divine punishment,⁴⁰ not to the leading position of insignificant humans in Psalm 8:5.⁴¹ Frevel persuasively states that “das Niedrigkeitsmotiv” “betont in einer pessimistischen Sicht die Sündhaftigkeit des Menschen, verbindet diese konstitutiv mit seiner Geschöpflichkeit und spricht damit der Gottklage aufgrund der Inferiorität des Menschen die Rechtfertigung ab.”⁴² So it is misleading to state that Job 15:14 intends to parody Psalm 8:5 or that Eliphaz “rebukes Job for using Psalm 8.”⁴³

40 Good, *Tempest*, 243.

41 Likewise, Bildad's rhetoric of Job 25:5–6 that could be claimed as parody of Ps 8:4–5 might be placed in the same view as Eliphaz's perspective on the humanity of Job 4:17–19 and 15:14–16. However, this claim should be rejected too. The words shared between them are commonplace, and there is little that points to a specific textual connection. See Kynes, *My Psalm*, 74. The literary structure in Job 25:2–4 is divided into two contrasting parts: God's majestic dominion and unlimited power (vv. 2–3), and the unrighteousness and impurity of human beings (v. 4). In Job 25:5–6, the brightness of the “moon” (יָרֵחַ) and “stars” (כּוֹכָבִים), which cannot be compared with the perfection of divinity, implies the defectiveness of humans before God, and “a maggot” (רֶמָּה) and “a worm” (תּוֹלֵעָה) metaphorically are the fragility of humans (cf. Ps 22:7; Isa 41:14). Cf. Gordis, *Job*, 277.

42 Christian Frevel, “Eine kleine Theologie der Menschenwürde: Ps 8 und seine Rezeption im Buch Ijob,” in *Das Manna fällt auch heute noch: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie des Alten, Ersten Testaments* (Freiburg: Herder, 2004), 268. Here Frevel notices that “unter diesem Oberbegriff fasst Markus Witte Ijob 25,2–6; 4,12–21 und 15,11–16 zusammen.”

43 The analysis of Kynes, *My Psalm*, 73–75 is exaggerated in determining the degree of allusion from one text to another. Regarding two occasions in Job, 19:9 (Job) and 25:5–6 (Bildad), Kynes argues for parody drawn from Psalm 8, but the argument is nearly groundless.

4.3 *Implications*

In the two cases of Job 7 and 15, we could not find any definitive reasons to suppose that Job 7:17–18 and 15:14–16 parody Psalm 8. As Helmut Schnieringer claims, these linguistic similarities should be comprehended in different literary modes drawn from the shared knowledge of the formula *מה-אנוש כי*.⁴⁴ Namely, while Psalm 8:5 fits in the typical mode of praise about the divine care in relationship with the Creator, Job 7:17–18 belongs to the skeptical mode in which God's justice is strongly doubted. Job is not interested in praising his deity or manipulating the Psalmist's intention or a psalmic tradition, but the sufferer laments the divine ill-treatment and excessive attention after God's protection has disappeared (7:19). On the contrary, Eliphaz's didactic speech in Job 15:14–16 points to human defectiveness in an accusatory mode, without reference to the notion of creation. Seeking to determine the chronological direction of influence between the two texts is heuristically useful for our discussion but cannot finally be accomplished with certainty. The compositional date of Psalm 8 (also, Ps 144) should be placed in the broad period of the sixth to fifth century BCE, not earlier than the sixth century BCE.⁴⁵ And the compositional date of Job in its present form is not earlier than the postexilic period.⁴⁶

Thus, one cannot determine whether Job 7:17–18 depends on Psalm 8 or Psalm 144:3–4. From the observations above those psalmic texts were neither influenced by wisdom ideology or language⁴⁷ nor the source text of Job. If those texts—Psalm 8, 144; Job 7, 15—were formed in the postexilic period, the most probable explanation for those similarities is that they were produced in a shared compositional culture. If we connect Genesis 1 with Job 7 and Psalm 144, we would assume that Job 7:17–18 indirectly expresses broad irony concerning the human-centered perspective in the creation account of the priestly literature.⁴⁸

44 Jean-Georges Heintz, "Helmut Schnieringer, Psalm 8, Text—Gestalt—Bedeutung (ÄAT 59) Wiesbaden, Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 85.2 (2005): 432–433.

45 Gerstenberger, *Psalms: Part 2*, 68 argues in his form-critical analysis that when seeing that Ps 8 has "a terse direct address of God" and its "confessional language," Psalm 8 seems "to be rooted in the latest strata of the OT."

46 For instance, see Fohrer, *Das Buch Hiob*; Gordis, *Job*; Clines, *Job 1–20*.

47 Gerstenberger considers that Ps 144:3–4 with other texts in Psalms 39, 90, 139 reflects "the context of suffering, the quest for justice, and the fear of mortality and guilt" which is a wisdom theme (69). Erhard Gerstenberger, *Psalms, Part 1: With an Introduction to Cultic Poetry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 69; *Psalms: Part 2*, 428.

48 JiSeong J. Kwon, "Divergence of the Book of Job from Deuteronomical/Priestly Torah: Intertextual Reading between Job and Torah," *SJOT* 32.1 (2018): 49–71.

5 Conclusion

Overall, the claim of Job's parody of Psalms lacks proper evidence, and there is little reason to believe that the author of Job imitated and mocked specific psalm texts and their ideological position or scoffed at the psalmists. Although one may see substantial similarities between Job and other texts within the Hebrew Bible—Deutero-Isaiah, Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, Proverbs, and Lamentations—it is impossible to trace a parody of any biblical texts, due to a similar lack of evidence. Of course, the dialogue between Job and his three friends and Elihu is full of irony in mutual intersections concerning the form of praise, hymn, instruction, and texts of Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah. The form of the hymn was variously adopted in intertextual contexts without saying that there was a conscious reference to psalmic texts, just as the typical form of the legal lawsuit or disputation permeates the context of Job,⁴⁹ and ancient mythology about primeval chaos is appropriated in many parts of Job.⁵⁰

In its sarcastic nuance, the figure of Job was designed to portray the bitter irony of the traditional belief that his deity will grant blessings to the one who has religious piety. Its dialogue between Job and his friends shows the essential difference of understanding the human act and its consequence and the cause of suffering. While in the perspective of Job's friends, his suffering is not far from the divine punishment of the wicked (Job 11:13–20; 22:4–11), in Job's view, it is manifested in the way of unfair violence of God toward the innocent (19:7–12). The typical hymn to God loses its original context and is relocated into the new circumstance of God's arbitrary and hostile act (Job 9:4–13; 12:13–25; 23:8–14) to deliver the skeptical viewpoint regarding divine justice. In YHWH's first speech (Job 38–39), although the list of the national world that the Egyptian onomastica would influence appears in Job 38 and Psalm 148, the disputation speech in Job 38 should be distinguished from a typical praise hymn (e.g., Psalm 149) and is most likely seen as an ironizing of the hymnic form and priestly ideology;⁵¹ the main thought of YHWH's first speech is the divine force in the universe, which is irrelevant to the protection and care in

49 F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job*, BJS 348 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007), argues that the dialogue of Job adopted the lawsuit form in Neo-Babylonian trial laws. See also Magdalene, "ANE Legal Origins of Impairment as Theological Disability and the Book of Job."

50 E.g., Elmer B. Smick, "Mythology and the Book of Job," *JETS* 13.2 (1970): 101–108; Othmar Keel, *Jahwes Entgegnung an Ijob: eine Deutung von Ijob 38–41 vor dem Hintergrund der zeitgenössischen Bildkunst* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978); Johannes C. de Moor, "Ugarit and the Origin of Job," in *Ugarit and the Bible*, ed. George J. Brooke (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1994), 225–257.

51 Heinz Richter, "Die Naturweisheit des Alten Testaments im Buche Hiob," *ZAW* 70 (1958): 1–20; Gerhard von Rad, "Hiob xxxviii und die altägyptische Weisheit," in *Wisdom in*

the priestly literature. That is to say, YHWH in Job 38–39 does not answer to: “Why does not YHWH’s ability and protection work for the marginalized, and why does he remain unconcerned about the problem?” Therefore, theological messages in hymnic/praise forms and genres found in Psalms 1, 8, 73, 107 are broadly indicated in the book of Job, but they are used as a literary tool to present issues of innocent suffering, despair, and injustice in dramatic irony.

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Irony in the Elihu Speeches?

Stephan Lauber

The thematic and theological contributions made by the Elihu speeches of Job 32–37 to the Joban poetry as a whole have been the subject of much debate:¹ while a minority of interpreters regard the passage as the climax of the entire book,² the vast majority consider it a secondary addition, disrupting the book's original structure with material notably weaker than the dialogues of chapters 3–27 in conceptual and linguistic terms.³

Some interpreters—notably, William Whedbee and Norman C. Habel—have traced this inferiority (which is mostly taken for granted) not to any lack of literary ability or theological originality, but have sought to explain it, instead, as a deliberate deployment of irony.⁴ More precisely, these commentators assume that the Elihu speeches, rather than *actually defending* the traditional theology of retribution which they profess, in God's name, to advocate (cf. Job 36:2), are in fact meant to *ironically deconstruct* that theological view by presenting a garrulous fool as its proponent. As John B. Curtis succinctly put it,

The ultimate coup de grace for a foolish theology is to have it presented by an unsympathetic spokesman, who is so muddle-headed and ridiculous that no character nor even the narrator will deign to acknowledge

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- 1 The present article is a revised and adapted version of Stephan Lauber, "Hi 32 als hellenistisches Proömium." *ZAW* 125 (2013): 607–621. Translated by Tobias Gabel.
 - 2 This view has been expressed most notably by Karl Budde, *Das Buch Hiob* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), XLV–XLIX.
 - 3 See, for instance, the historical overview of scholarship on this topic in Harald-Martin Wahl, *Der gerechte Schöpfer: Eine redaktions- und theologiegeschichtliche Untersuchung der Elihureden—Hiob 32–37* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), 1–35, 189–207.
 - 4 Cf. William Whedbee, "The Comedy of Job." *Semeia* 7 (1977): 1–39, here 18–20; Norman C. Habel, "The Role of Elihu in the Design of the Book of Job," in *In the Shelter of Elyon: Essays on Ancient Palestinian Life and Literature* (Festschrift Gösta W. Ahlström), ed. W. Boyd Barrick and John R. Spencer (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1984), 81–98; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985), 443–447; Hendrik Viviers, "Elihu (Job 32–37): Garrulous but Poor Rhetor? Why is He Ignored?," in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas H. Olbricht (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 137–153, here 138.

his presence either before or after his appearance. Elihu is the *reductio ad absurdum* of traditional theology. Once he has spoken, traditional dogma can no longer be defended.⁵

In the terms of classical rhetoric, then, Elihu might be said to play the role of the ἀλαζών,⁶ the “braggart” of Old Comedy, whose performance would be ironized through hyperbole or the display of character traits manifestly in conflict with his stated views and ideals. Quintilian refers to this strategy of the ἀλαζών as *simulatio*, the pretense, in a provocative or ostentatiously simple-minded manner, at agreement with the opinions of the opposing party.⁷

According to this interpretation, it is in Elihu’s self-introduction in the first chapter of the sequence (Job 32) that he is most notably presented as an intentionally ridiculous figure along these lines, setting the perspective for readers’ reception of his remaining speeches. As Whedbee remarks, “His long, verbose introduction sets the tone for his whole contribution.”⁸

Hendrik Viviers has aimed to substantiate this estimation by measuring Elihu’s rhetorical performance against the example of the *vir bonus*, the ideal rhetorician postulated by Quintilian and Cicero, whose impeccable character serves to guarantee the sincerity and validity of his speech.⁹ Elihu, Viviers writes, may begin his introduction comparatively humbly, including only a few elements of self-praise: “It develops, however, rapidly to an inflated self-righteousness which bears testimony of exaggerated self-praise and vanity ... If the values of a person are transferred to his act (speech) ... the

5 John B. Curtis, “Why were the Elihu Speeches Added to the Book of Job?,” *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Biblical Societies* 8 (1988): 93–99, here 98.

6 Cf. Whedbee, “Comedy of Job,” 20.

7 Cf. Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1990), par. 902, with reference to Quintilian, *Inst.* 6.3.85.

8 Whedbee, “Comedy of Job,” 19. See also, for instance, Paul Dhorme, *Le livre de Job* (Paris: Gabalda, 1926), 442; Patrick W. Skehan, “‘I will speak up!’ (Job 32),” *CBQ* 31 (1969): 380–382; Habel, *Book of Job*, 445–447; Norman Whybray, *Job* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 139–140; Matthew J. Lynch, “Bursting at the Seams: Phonetic Rhetoric in the Speeches of Elihu,” *JSOT* 30 (2006): 345–364, here 349–354.

9 Cf., for instance, Franz-Hubert Robling, “Vir bonus dicendi peritus,” cols. 1134–1138 in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Vol. 9, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2009); Carl J. Classen, “Aristoteles: Forderungen an den vollkommenen Redner,” in *Airetai und Virtutes: Untersuchungen zu den Wertvorstellungen der Griechen und Römer*, ed. Carl J. Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 87–106; Carl J. Classen, “Quintilians Redner: ein vir bonus dicendi peritus,” in *Airetai und Virtutes*, 261–269.

implied audience should be uncomfortable to hear Elihu out.”¹⁰ This assessment amounts to an accusation, familiar since patristic times,¹¹ of garrulity and arrogance.

In fact, Quintilian had admonished orators to cultivate a style that was “calm and mild with no trace of pride, elevation or sublimity”, and to speak “appropriately, pleasantly and persuasively” (*Inst.* vi.2.19). While it is, of course, anachronistic to look on his *Institutio oratoria* as a binding model for the Elihu speeches, the comparison is not wholly unreasonable on account of the (at least partial) universality of Quintilian’s criteria.

However, the assessment that Elihu’s self-commendation in Job 32 is going against the requirements set out by Quintilian and therefore intends to ironically expose him—and all his subsequent statements in chapters 33–37—to ridicule, is based entirely on subjective responses to the text, without being able to provide any objective corroboration or external standards of comparison. Such a yardstick of interpretation can only be based on other texts dating from roughly the same period as the Elihu speeches;¹² moreover, it can only be based on texts whose function is analogous to that of Job 32 in that they are prefatory remarks intended to elucidate the motivation and occasion of the literary work to follow.

In order to set up that comparison, I will first provide a brief account of how the text of Job 32 unfolds.

1 The Structure and Discursive Sequence of Job 32

1.1 32:1–5: A Secondary Prose Introduction

In several respects, vv. 1–5, which are in prose, constitute an equivalent to Elihu’s poetic self-introduction in the following vv. 6–22 and have certainly to be considered a literary addition. The introductory verses report, in the third

¹⁰ Viviers, “Elihu,” 141–142.

¹¹ Most prominently, this accusation is raised in that main work of Gregory the Great (c. 540–604), *Moralia in Librum Iob*, which proved seminal for exegesis of Job throughout the middle ages, in particular, but which retained at least some of its authority well into the nineteenth century (cf. the wealth of references in Wahl, *Der gerechte Schöpfer*, 4 and n. 27–28).

¹² For evidence suggesting a late Persian or Hellenistic date, see, among others, Wahl, *Der gerechte Schöpfer*, 182–187; Leo G. Perdue, *The Sword and the Stylus: An Introduction to Wisdom in the Age of Empires* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 118; Tanja Pilger, *Erziehung im Leiden: Komposition und Theologie der Elihureden in Hiob 32–37* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 27–35; Stephan Lauber, *Weisheit im Widerspruch: Studien zu den Elihu-Reden in Ijob 32–37* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2013), 431–440.

person, on the three friends' failure to refute Job (v. 1) and on Elihu's anger against Job and against the friends on account of this failure (vv. 2–3.5), citing Elihu's respect for his elders as the reason—unfounded, it now appears—for his previous silence (v. 4). Elihu's assessment of the preceding poetic dialogue, which he thinks inadequate and, ultimately, unsuccessful, serves as an indirect argument for the necessity of undertaking another, more successful refutation. Thus, the rationale and theme of his subsequent deliberations are established for the first time.

1.2 32:6–9: *The Occasion and Aims of Elihu's Speeches*

In vv. 6–7, Elihu, speaking in the first person, justifies his previous silence by referring again to the high esteem in which he had always held his elders and their wisdom. This earlier veneration is then contrasted, in vv. 8–9, with a definition-like statement calling into question precisely this traditional view of a correlation between old age and extensive wisdom: “It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right.”

After the poetic dialogue had highlighted the failure of the conventional wisdom of old age, Elihu felt compelled to enter the controversy himself and state his own views. Thus, the rationale and theme of his following arguments are stated (for the second time on the level of the final redaction after their first presentation in the secondary introduction of vv. 1–5).

1.3 32:10–14: *Elihu's Summons to Listen and Justification of His Own Arguments*

Throughout this entire passage, Elihu addresses the friends directly, in the second person, and begins by calling on them¹³ to listen to what he is about to say (v. 10): he had followed their arguments intently, but his expectations that they would present a satisfactory refutation of Job's position were disappointed (vv. 11–12). For this reason, Elihu contends, the friends should abandon their hubris (v. 13) and pay attention to his own, superior reasoning (v. 14).

The function of this passage, then, is twofold: addressing the panel of the three friends, Elihu makes the case for his right to a reasoning of his own, while at the same time declaring (in vv. 6–9) that, given the friends' earlier failure, there is no alternative to this novel kind of reasoning.

13 On the plural function of the adhortative שמעו־לִי as an indefinite form of address, see, for instance, GKC par. 144h.p; Theresia Mende, *Durch Leiden zur Vollendung: Die Elihureden im Buch Ijob (Ijob 32–37)* (Trier: Paulinus, 1990), 19.

1.4 **32:15–20: *Elihu's Aspirations and Self-Praise as a Form of captatio benevolentiae***

Elihu assures his listeners / readers that he is both ready and able to deliver a passionate and ultimately convincing argument, thus countering the friends' current silence—the lasting manifestation of their failure—with his own eloquence. This is realized firstly, in vv. 15–16, with an apostrophe to the audience, indirectly asking readers to recognize the friends' failure and to grant Elihu the right to present his own reasoning. Then Elihu presents himself and his intentions (without any explicit addressing) in vv. 17–20, culminating in a series of poetic images (in vv. 18–19) meant to illustrate the urgency of these intentions and thus his aptitude for, and inner drive towards, controversy. Elihu's self-praise, intended to portray him as a passionate teacher of wisdom, lays out in no uncertain terms his claims to superior insight and rhetorical skill.

1.5 **32:21–22: *Elihu's Rhetorical Strategy***

In the concluding vv. 21–22, Elihu mentions his willingness to present his arguments without any false consideration for his listeners or anyone else (v. 21), thus asserting his moral and dispositional capability for undertaking the task he has set himself. In this, he conforms fully to the attitude demanded—even by God himself—of those engaged in controversy; otherwise he would be “taken away” by “[his] Maker” (v. 22). Elihu's resolve to display impartiality and integrity reinforces the aspiration towards a convincing and passionate argument he had set for himself in vv. 15–20. By implication, it also amounts to a demand for some form of recognition for his plan.

2 **Job 32: A Comparison with the Sirach Prologue and 2 Maccabees 2:19–32**

In looking for deuterocanonical (apocryphal) texts for comparison which are functionally similar to Job 32, the Sirach Prologue and the preface of the epitomator (i.e. the author providing an ἐπιτομή, “summary”, from the historical account of Jason of Cyrene, cf. 2 Macc 2:23) in 2 Maccabees 2:19–32 suggest themselves, since both are adaptations of the (originally Greek-Hellenistic) genre of the proem.¹⁴ Their analogous division into five parts each, deployment of similar rhetorical devices, and various parallels of content all serve to

14 On the generic history of the proem, see Klaus Berger, “Hellenistische Gattungen im Neuen Testament,” *ANRW* 25.2 (1984): 1031–1432, here 1171–1173; Irmgard Männlein-Robert,

suggest that Job 32, likewise, draws on the structural and topical conventions of the Greek proem:

	SirProl	2 Macc 2	Job 32
Theme	vv. 1–3	vv. 19–22	(vv. 1–5)
Occasion and aims	vv. 4–14	vv. 23–24	vv. 6–9
Addressing the audience	vv. 15–17a	v. 25	vv. 10–14
captatio benevolentiae / self-praise	vv. 17b–26	vv. 26–27	vv. 15–20
statements of rhetorical strategy	vv. 27–36	vv. 28–31(.32)	vv. 21–22

First, each proem names the *theme* of the larger work about to be introduced: in the case of SirProl vv. 1–3, this is the wisdom handed down through the law, the prophets, and other later writings; in 2 Maccabees 2:19–22, the deeds of Judas Maccabaeus and his brothers. In Job 32, the same function is discharged by the secondary introduction (vv. 1–5),¹⁵ which presents Elihu’s argument as motivated by his anger in replying to Job (v. 2) and the friends (vv. 3.5), respectively.

Second, each of the texts comments on the occasion and genesis of the work in question, as well as on authorial intention. Thus, the stated purpose in SirProl vv. 4–14 is to pass on the work of the translator’s grandfather, while the aim according to 2 Maccabees 2:23–24 is to simplify and “tighten” the earlier account provided by Jason of Cyrene. Job 32:6–9, in turn, mentions Elihu’s initial willingness to be taught “wisdom” by “advanced years” (vv. 6–7). He then had been frustrated, however, by the friends’ failure, coming to the awareness that it is not old age on its own, but rather the gift of the Spirit, that will bring about understanding. This insight both legitimizes and motivates Elihu’s own reasoning.

In their third parts, all texts address their audiences, with authors appealing to their readers for attention and approval. In SirProl, this is made explicit (cf. vv. 15–17a), while the epitomator of 2 Maccabees 2:25 chooses an indirect route, announcing his intention to please and profit his audience. Elihu in Job 32:10–14 likewise turns to the friends as the textual addressees of his argument. However, he does not court them for their attention, he does not plead:

“Prooemium,” cols. 247–256 in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Vol. 7, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

15 In substance, Budde, *Das Buch Hiob*, 200, arrives at a similar conclusion regarding the function of this passage. Budde explains the insertion by reference to the necessity of informing addressees about the newly introduced speaker, as well as about the views represented by him.

his adhortative exclamation שמעו־לי “Listen to me!” is an outright demand for attention.

As a fourth constitutive element, the proems in SirProl (vv. 17b–26) and 2 Maccabees 2 (vv. 26–27) add a declaration of humility intended as *captatio benevolentiae*. In both cases, this includes an account of the many problems usually connected with literary work and the great effort needed to overcome them in a satisfying way. This is meant to underscore the merit of the final result. In addition, SirProl alludes to the difficulty of Hebrew–Greek translation¹⁶ and asks for his readers’ indulgence with regards to the potentially faulty rendering of certain, not easily translated terms. 2 Maccabees 2:26–27 remains more vague, simply pointing to the “uncomfortable toil” and “effort” undertaken by the epitomator. There is no comparable declaration of humility in Job 32:15–20, and indeed it would scarcely be compatible with Elihu’s claim to superior reasoning. However, there had been one earlier declaration of humility in vv. 6–7; namely, Elihu’s description of how he had previously been willing—despite being only “little in days”—to let “multitude of years” teach him wisdom. Verses 15–20, by contrast, contain his fulsome self-praise, which, just like a declaration of humility and the use of images¹⁷ such as the comparison in v. 19, form part of the rhetorical topics of the proem genre. Together, they are all meant to win over the speaker’s audience outside of the text.

Fifth and finally, all texts contain statements about the respective speaker’s specific strategy: the author of SirProl vv. 27–36 claims diligence and effort, zeal and expertise, accompanied by another instance of *captatio benevolentiae* in referring to the great erudition of his addressees—as a standard to which his own work is meant to aspire. In 2 Maccabees 2:28–31, the epitomator explains the character of his text which, he says, is supposed to be neither a work of fastidious historiography nor a piece of original research. Instead, closely following his prototype and drawing on metaphors of building and construction work, he announces his aim to present “the outlines of the condensation” (v. 28) and “a brief account without going into a detailed discussion” (v. 31). Verse 32 concludes the proem and acts as a segue to the main part of this “brief account.” In Job 32:21–22, the author’s rejection of flattery as a means of winning over an audience is tantamount to an assertion of objectivity and authorial autonomy.

16 This may well be considered the first-ever reference on record to the difficulty of translation work; cf. Johannes Marböck, *Jesus Sirach 1–23* (Freiburg i. Br. et al.: Herder, 2010), 39.

17 See, for instance, Männlein-Robert, “Prooemium,” col. 251.

3 Job 32 and the Proem to the *Evagoras* of Isocrates

In spite of all those similarities, there are also significant differences to be found: the proems in Sirach and 2 Maccabees 2:19–22 are clearly set off from their respective main texts and restrict themselves, moreover, to a few introductory remarks. They also already exhibit clear tendencies towards formalization,¹⁸ something that would become even more pronounced in later biblical instances of the genre, namely, in the prologues to the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:1–4) and Acts (1:1).¹⁹

In Job 32, on the other hand, the argumentation begins within the proem itself: The opposition between Elihu and the friends is given ample explanation, and the initial situation—namely, the friends' failure and Elihu's superior wisdom—is not only mentioned, but is expounded upon in great detail. At the same time, this introduces the basic theme which forms the optimistic foundation of Job 33:1–36:21, namely, the conviction of being able to know and trace God's actions on the basis of wisdom.

The same kind of motivic and thematic interlocking of proem and main text is characteristic of early Greek prose. In texts from this era, the treatment of the topic discussed in the main part also often begins in the prologue (and continues through to the epilogue). In order to arrive at an even more adequate standard of comparison for Job 32, the chapter will thus be confronted with a text sample from the Isocratean corpus. Isocrates (436–338 BCE) is considered one of the most widely read and influential authors of classical antiquity.²⁰ After he had founded a school of rhetoric around the year 390 BCE, Isocrates, as teacher to a considerable number of students, wielded considerable influence during his lifetime and was highly regarded as an authority on rhetoric for centuries after his death. Even into imperial times, he remained one of the

18 On the history and development of the proem genre, see Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, pars. 266–279; Männlein-Robert, "Prooemium," cols. 247–256; Eva Marqués-López, "Prolog," cols. 201–208 in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, Vol. 7, ed. Gert Ueding (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005).

19 See, for instance, Loveday Alexander, "Luke's Preface in the Context of Greek Preface-Writing," *NovT* 28 (1986): 48–74, here esp. 54–71, describing the prologue to Luke as an adaptation of "scientific prefaces." Arguably it was this historical development of the genre that contributed to its negative assessment as early as in the writings of Gregory the Great (cf. n. 11 above).

20 See, for instance, Manfred Fuhrmann, *Die Dichtungstheorie der Antike: Aristoteles—Horaz—„Longin“* (Düsseldorf and Zürich: Artemis & Winkler, 2003), 24; Klaus Thraede, "Isokrates," *RAC* 18 (1998): cols. 1027–1048, here col. 1027.

preferred authors for use in the classroom, and his views on education have had a rich and varied history of reception.²¹

Nevertheless, judgments of Isocrates in nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholarship were largely negative—a fact which may be traced, interestingly enough, to an assessment not wholly dissimilar from that reiterated, throughout exegetical history, in relation to the Elihu speeches: Isocrates, scholars held, had been a vain, conceited self-promoter—this was the main allegation, accompanied by charges of superficiality, verbosity, and a general lack of principles.²² Only recently have scholars begun to recognize the true importance of Isocrates, which is evident from his widespread and favorable reception throughout antiquity.²³

Thirty of Isocrates' works have survived: six forensic speeches, nine letters, and fifteen public speeches which—despite their rhetoric ostensibly aimed at oral presentation—were primarily intended to be read as textbook examples of rhetorical technique.²⁴

The text sample used for the following comparison with Job 32 is the proem of Isocrates' funeral oration honoring King Evagoras of Salamis in Cyprus, who had died in 373 BC—a text which has subsequently been known under the name of its royal subject. Siegfried Kreuzer has compared this proem with the Sirach Prologue,²⁵ but it is even more suitable to shed light on the literary character of the introduction to the Elihu speeches. In particular, the Isocratic text offers a standard of comparison with regards to the question: what degree of self-presentation—and of an orator's claim to the inherent worth and validity of his own literary and argumentative accomplishment—may be considered topically appropriate?

21 Cf. Wolfgang Eisenhut, *Einführung in die antike Rhetorik und ihre Geschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1994), 27–29; Albin Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur* (München: Saur, 1971), 654–663; Thraede, "Isokrates," cols. 1035–1048; Terry L. Papillon, "Isocrates," in *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, ed. Ian Wootington (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell, 2007), 58–74.

22 Cf. Wolfgang Orth, "Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Isokrates-Rezeption," in *Isokrates: Neue Ansätze zur Bewertung eines politischen Schriftstellers*, ed. Wolfgang Orth (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2003), 1–6, here 1 and n. 3–4, with additional references; as well as Lesky, *Geschichte der griechischen Literatur*, 654.

23 Cf. Thraede, "Isokrates," col. 1029.

24 Cf. Sylvia Usener, "Isokrates und sein Adressatenkreis: Strategien schriftlicher Kommunikation," in *Isokrates: Neue Ansätze*, ed. Orth, 18–33.

25 Cf. Siegfried Kreuzer, "Der Prolog des Buches Ben Sira (Weisheit des Jesus Sirach) im Horizont seiner Gattung: Ein Vergleich mit dem Euagoras des Isokrates," in *Geschehen und Gedächtnis: Die hellenistische Welt und ihre Wirkung: Festschrift für Wolfgang Orth zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Jens-Frederik Eckholdt, Marcus Sigismund, and Susanne Sigismund (Berlin: LIT, 2009), 135–160.

Isocrates' proem consists of three parts,²⁶ which conform to the pattern at the basis of the relevant biblical comparanda, namely: (1) occasion and aims (pars. 1–4); (2) addressing the audience (pars. 5–7); and (3) statement of strategy and *captatio benevolentiae* (pars. 8–11).

More specifically, the text proceeds as follows.²⁷

3.1 *Pars. 1–4: Occasion and Aims*

First, Isocrates comments on the occasion and aims of his eulogy: while Nicocles, who is addressed directly, is worthy of praise for honoring the tomb of his father Evagoras (par. 1), a proper funerary oration, Isocrates holds, is more appropriate than all other forms of tribute (pars. 2–4). To substantiate his claim, the rhetor expounds, in detail, on the merits of rhetoric when compared to other forms of honoring the deceased which were also customary as part of the funerary rites: libations, dances, musical performances, horse races, and other types of agon. In laying out this range of possible responses, Isocrates establishes a frame of comparison in relation to which the particular merit of his oration as constituting the greatest possible tribute to the deceased may be appreciated. In contrast to all the other honors mentioned—which, Isocrates argues, served first and foremost to aggrandize the performers and athletes participating in them (cf. par. 4)—his funerary oration establishes “a memory that shall never die” (cf. par. 3).²⁸ Such a memory beyond death, Isocrates says, is the kind of recognition really sought by “men of ambition and greatness of soul.”

3.2 *Pars. 5–7: Addressing the Audience*

In the second section of the eulogy, Isocrates turns to his hearers/readers. This is expressed, on the one hand, through a rhetorical question in par. 6, which challenges his audience to take a stand, and, on the other, through the orator's stated aspiration to garner the approval of “men of intelligence” (par. 7) for his position, which is intended as an offer of identification for his addressees. Likewise, the inclusive usage of the first-person plural in par. 7 is meant to create solidarity between the speaker and his listeners.

In terms of content, Isocrates calls on his audience to honor and eulogize not only the protagonists of some bygone heroic age but also their deserving

26 On the structural disposition of the text, see Evangelos Alexiou, *Der Euagoras des Isokrates: Ein Kommentar* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 65.

27 For the text source, cf. for instance the Greek-English edition Isocrates, “Evagoras,” trans. Larue van Hook, *LCL* 373 (1945): 2–51.

28 Cf. Kreuzer, “Der Prolog des Buches Ben Sira,” 145–146.

contemporaries (par. 5)—an oratorical duty neglected by rival rhetors on account of their resentment and jealousy (par. 6) but willingly undertaken, we are given to understand, by Isocrates himself, who possesses the necessary greatness of character.

3.3 *Pars. 8–11: Statement of Strategy and captatio benevolentiae*

In pars. 8–11, Isocrates comments on his *modus operandi* and on the accompanying difficulties, which turns this passage into another emphatic advertisement of the high value of his work, soliciting the audience's recognition. In particular, Isocrates addresses in detail the arduous nature of his rhetorical trade, which is of course intended to underline the magnitude of his success. After all, his eulogy is distinguished by the fact, Isocrates explains, that it was written not in verse but in prose, thus forfeiting any chance of glossing over faulty or inadequate content with a superficial polish. Again, this heightens the value of his achievement. In pars. 9–10, he explains at length why, in his view, prose authors will always be inferior to poets in terms of their expressive capabilities. For the same reason, Isocrates argues, even philosophers (unlike himself) had yet to master a comparable challenge (cf. par. 8): once more, the rhetor restates his claim to recognition for his pioneering feat. Had he not, after all, risen to the challenge by composing a funeral oration in prose—rather than a verse eulogy—to immortalize the dead king? Surely this meant a renunciation of poetical gimmickry in favor of a concentration on the facts of Evagoras' greatness (par. 11).²⁹ By way of consequence, Isocrates charges his audience to interpret the ostensible plainness of his style as a bold piece of innovation demonstrating, in fact, his rhetorical mastery.

The structure and rhetorical strategy of Isocrates' proem, as well as its content, exhibit a number of parallels with Job 32:

- (1) Isocrates' remarks on the funeral oration as the appropriate form for honoring the dead in pars. 1–4 are tantamount to a rejection of all other efforts undertaken thus far to commemorate the deceased king in a manner appropriate to his rank—and in the rhetor's view, this can only mean: by preserving his fame for posterity. By implication, Isocrates' assessment of all other tributes as insufficient and incommensurate already establishes the necessity of a eulogy like the one he himself is delivering. In a very similar way, Job 32:6–9 establishes the necessity of Elihu's intervention in the ongoing conversation through reference to the friends' failure after their refutations of Job have proven unsatisfactory.

29 On this, see Alexiou, *Der Euagoras des Isokrates*, 28–37.

- (2) In terms of style, Isocrates' comments on the occasion and aims of his rhetorical venture in pars. 1–4 are characterized by a certain degree of verbosity: witness his exhaustive description of different kinds of honors bestowed upon Evagoras before arguing—equally exhaustively—for the superiority of rhetoric when it comes to preserving the fame of the dead king. Evidently, Isocrates considers this kind of verbosity a suitable rhetorical strategy for persuading his listeners of the relevance of what he is about to say, and for rousing their interest.

Elihu's statements in Job 32:6–9, with their extensive reference to the traditional topos of old age and wisdom being correlated (vv. 6–7), followed by the confrontation of this topos with a superior form of wisdom in vv. 8–9, may be understood in a similar way: Elihu's legitimizing opening is intended to create a truly firm ground on which to base his subsequent remarks, rendering his rejection of rival viewpoints easily comprehensible, and indeed irrefutable. At the same time, his introductory comments are meant to rouse his audience's interest, as is evident from the way in which Elihu announces the "pioneering feat" of putting forward a completely novel argument (cf. pars. 8–11 in Isocrates). This novelty of Elihu's argument consists in the fact that it does not resort to the proverbial wisdom of old age, but instead draws on the gift of the Spirit. Just as in the corresponding passage of the *Evagoras*, there is not the slightest suggestion of irony in this claim and no evident intention to deconstruct Elihu's subsequent statements.

- (3) In turning to their respective addressees, the *Evagoras* (pars. 5–7) and Job 32:10–14 express the same idea: others might well have fulfilled the task now taken on by the orator, but had not been capable of doing so, which had caused *him* to become active. Isocrates refers to prose writers and poets, arguing that it was their calling to sing the praises of prominent contemporaries, rather than limit themselves to encomia to mythical figures. The cause of their negligence, Isocrates holds, was a resentful envy, typical of "men whose minds are so perverted" (τοῖς οὕτω κακῶς φρονούσιν, par. 7).

According to Elihu's statements in Job 32:10–14, the addressees themselves—i.e., the friends—had failed to live up to the requirements of their shared objective—namely, to refute Job's position—and they had done so out of inability (cf. vv. 12b–c). As a result, Elihu must take on this task alone.

- (4) The *captatio benevolentiae* of the *Evagoras* (pars. 8–11) differs from that in Job 32:15–20 in its extensive use of the "language of difficulty," which

of course is intended to make the rhetor's ultimate accomplishment of his task appear all the more glorious. What both texts have in common, however, is their respective speaker's clearly articulated awareness of their own aptitude vis-à-vis the task they have chosen for themselves. Not only are they convinced that they will accomplish it fully: they will also be better, more effective than any possible rivals. This, again, is meant to "capture the benevolence" of the addressees, to convince them of the speaker's personal suitability and literary merit. Isocrates clearly expresses his confidence in his own ability to present, even in the difficult form of the prose oration, an effective and worthy eulogy. Furthermore, he argues, such an oration will be characterized by a greater degree of truthfulness when compared to a verse encomium, which, moreover, is easier to compose.

In his remarks, which are equally steeped in self-confidence, Elihu leaves no doubt that, in light of his inspired urge to speak up, he will be able to present a refutation of Job's claims that will be superior to the attempts undertaken by his friends, who have failed and are reduced to silence (cf. vv. 15–16).

A comparison of both texts, then, reveals a common rhetorical strategy pursued by similar means:

	<i>Evagoras</i>	Job 32
Extensive rejection and depreciation of others' efforts and justification of own (superior) strategy	pars. 1–4	vv. (1–5+) 6–9
Turning to addressees in order to win them over to own rhetorical agenda / convince them of its worth	pars. 5–7	vv. 10–14
Statement of own ability to accomplish the task at hand; statement of own superiority and indirect injunction to addressees, demanding proper appreciation for own efforts	pars. 8–11	vv. 15–20 + 21–22

In addition to this, there is a strikingly close correlation, in the two cases analyzed here, with regards to the *quantitative* relation between the length of the proem compared to the length of the respective main text: the proem Job 32

comprises 22 verses out of a total, for the Elihu speeches, of 165, amounting to 13.3 percent of Job 32–37 as a whole. The *Evagoras* consists of 81 paragraphs more or less equal in length; 11 of these form the proem, which thus amounts to 13.6 percent of the entire oration. This latter proportion is also at least roughly comparable to that observable in other texts of the Isocratean corpus.³⁰ The proem to Job 33–37 is not, therefore, disproportionate in length to the Elihu speeches as a whole but is, on the contrary, entirely adequate to the argumentation following it.

4 Conclusion

The introduction to the Elihu speeches in Job 32 clearly takes its bearings from the literary genre of the Hellenistic proem, as is shown by the comparison above with the Sirach Prologue, 2 Maccabees 2:19–32, and, above all, with the proem to the *Evagoras* of Isocrates, whose structure, course of speech, relative length, and motifs are all strikingly similar to those of Job 32. This is not meant, of course, to suggest a relationship of direct literary influence between these texts. Nevertheless, the comparison has served to reveal at least one contemporary comparison text that forms a more reliable basis for any reconstruction of the intended meaning of Job 32 than does mere intuition brought to bear across a vast historical distance. Measured against the example of the *Evagoras*, however, the wisdom teacher Elihu is neither to be considered particularly “verbose,” nor is his lengthy affirmation of the high value of his own argument a sign of particular arrogance. Such exhaustive self-praise, filled with pride over having accomplished a difficult task and having been more successful at it, in fact, than other, less qualified contestants, may also be found in Isocrates, where it is intended to commend the work to its prospective readers, who are expected to react with the appropriate degree of appreciation and approval.

With these observations in mind, the interpretation of Elihu as a boastful ἀλαζών meant to be ironized through his inadvertently revealing self-presentation—thus ironically delegitimizing the theological views presented in his subsequent speeches—can hardly be upheld. In fact, quite the opposite is the case: the author’s adaptation of the genre form in Job 36:(1–5,) 6–22, as well as the rhetoric and motifs of that chapter, signal his intention of promoting, wholeheartedly and sincerely, the views put into Elihu’s mouth.

30 Compare, for instance, “Busiris”: 9 : 50 = 18 percent; “Panathenaikos”: 42 : 272 = 16.5 percent.

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A Typological Interpretation of Job That Is Dependent on Irony

Virginia Miller

This essay is a typological interpretation of the book of Job. In the first section of the essay I argue that the prologue of the book of Job is ironic and that the true meaning of the prologue is hidden. Moreover, I argue that the book of Job, as a satire, challenges the view that unjust suffering is caused by sin and that all sin must be avenged by a blood-avenger. In the second section of this essay, utilizing Austin Farrer's theory of types, I claim that the image of the blood redeemer in the book of Job is transformed by the Christ event.

1 Background—The Book of Job as a Satire and Irony Displayed

As the starting point for this argument, I claim that the book of Job is a satire. In a previous work, "The Book of Job as a Satire with Mention of Verbal Irony," I have argued this position extensively. I argue that the irony that is used in the book of Job is the kind of irony that is found in satire, that being verbal irony (according to the theorist of irony Douglas Muecke). Verbal irony is characterized by an ironist who is deliberately ironical, the specific presence of an object of ironic attack, and a corrective intent, or a moral focus.¹ In this work I focus my attention on the type of irony called Irony Displayed. Irony Displayed is a sub-category of verbal irony (the type of irony that is found in satire). Hence, in Irony Displayed there is the presence of an ironist who is pejoratively critical of the object of ironic attack. This attack is expressed in the deliberate literary arrangement of events that belittle the object of attack.² Of the two types of Irony Displayed in this sub-category, I discuss the type that is particularly helpful to the interpretation of the book of Job. Muecke explains this sub-category of verbal irony in the following way: "to accept the situation or the victim's position but develop it according to the victim's premises until

1 Virginia Ingram, "The Book of Job as a Satire with Mention of Verbal Irony," *St. Mark's Review* 1 (2017): 51–62 (52).

2 Douglas C. Muecke, *The Compass of Irony* (London: Methuen, 1969), 82, 93.

the absurdity of the conclusion confronts the plausibility of the beginning.”³ This sub-category of verbal irony is particularly helpful when it is applied to Job 1:6–12. In these verses the explicit presentation of facts consists of God allowing הַשָּׂטָן put Job to the test unjustly. Here I understand causing deliberate harm to an innocent to be unjust. Namely, the intentional killing of Job’s innocent family (1:19) is directly in contravention of the legal prohibition against murder. I reject the entire premise of a morally informed legal system that is underpinned by mercy and חַסֵּד if it is so that the author of the laws may test a person by allowing the murder of proxy people! Moreover, as far as a typological interpretation is concerned, which is the focus of the second half of this essay, God’s act of the Passion (in the mode of Christ) would seem to render the testing useless, i.e., salvation is freely bestowed on the faithful making the need for a test redundant.

I note here that הַשָּׂטָן is variously understood, in biblical scholarship, as the “accuser,” “adversary,” “attacker,” or even “executioner.”⁴ For the sake of this exercise it is necessary that we accept that God is in league with the שָׂטָן and testing Job unjustly, but develop this, supposed truism, according to the victim’s premise to see whether or not this will lead to an absurdity. If it does lead to an absurdity, we can argue that this presentation of events is ironic and that the true message of the events is hidden and, presumably, in opposition to the literal presentation of facts.

The unknowing victim of irony (as opposed to the object of ironic attack) in this instance is Job as he accepts the notion that God is testing him unjustly (or in other words the explicit presentation of facts in the narrative). Therefore, we must develop the literal presentation of facts along with Job’s premise. Job believes in a model of retributive justice, whereby it is assumed that those who are suffering suffer because of sins that they, themselves, or their parents have committed. There is no acceptance of suffering that is not related to sin. In this situation, if we accept Job’s worldview, Job’s suffering far outweighs any transgression he may have committed. Therefore, in line with his premise of retributive justice it is reasonable for Job to assume that God must be testing Job or afflicting Job unjustly, given that there is no worldly answer to this dilemma, if we are committed to Job’s worldview. The development of this premise leads to an absurdity in 19:25, where Job calls out for a לֹאֵל, an avenger of blood, who according to Numbers 35:19 and Deuteronomy 19:6, would vindicate Job’s suffering by punishing and potentially killing the guilty, in this instance, God.⁵

3 Muecke, *Compass of Irony*, 82.

4 Ryan E. Stokes, “Satan, YHWH’s Executioner,” *JBL* 133 2 (2014): 251–270, 251.

5 I note that there are various different interpretations of the word לֹאֵל. See Marvin H. Pope, *Job*. AB 15. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 135.

So, in line with Irony Displayed the absurdity of this conclusion (killing God for unjustly afflicting the righteous) must confront the plausibility of the beginning, which is, in this case, the testing scene (1:6–12). Hence, we can conclude that the representation of God in these passages is merely a God-construction in line with Job's erroneous view of suffering, i.e., that suffering is always the punishment for sin.

The representation of the testing God in Job might also be understood as a God-construction as it leads to an absurdity and contradicts the later understanding of God in the book of Job. For instance, in 40:8 God castigates Job by saying, "will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be justified?" If we were to accept the testing scene at face value, this statement of God's would seem to be inconsistent. Saliently, in 1:8, God, speaking of Job, says to the *יטו*, "There is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man who fears God and turns away from evil." Yet, despite this, God in league with the *יטו* goes on to ensure that Job's ten children and many servants are killed, that he loses all of his wealth and standing in society, and that his health is sorely afflicted. If these events are truly caused by God then it would be consistent for Job to justify himself with a claim against God's unjust behavior.

I argue that in reality, it is Job's and his friends' belief in the nature of God which oppresses the poor and disadvantaged. The poor are oppressed by this view because it does not accommodate the idea of unjust suffering. Furthermore, I suggest that God castigates Job and his friends in the speeches because they speak wrongly of God's nature. Indeed, in the speeches God clearly indicates in a lengthy dialogue that Job is ignorant when it comes to his understanding of God (38:2–40:2).

Here, I note the limitations of the genre of satire. For example, satire calls for reform, however, it cannot, in and of itself, effect reform and in this respect is limited in its utility. Hence, the book of Job merely presents a challenge to a strict view of retributive justice, especially whereby it is understood that unjust suffering is caused by sin, and that all sin must be avenged by a blood-avenger. Of course, this is not the only purpose of the book. Indeed, Gianfranco Ravasi argues compellingly that the book is multifaceted.⁶ However, it would be logical to assume that the primary theme of the book is the same theme that is mirrored in the redemptive action of Christ, as I go on to argue in a related typological interpretation. Hence, the redemption of sin is an important theme in the book of Job, if a typological, indeed backwards looking, argument is accepted.

6 Gianfranco Ravasi, *Il Libro di Giobbe*. (Bologna: Centro editoriale dehoniano, 2003), 21–22.

I argue that the purpose of the book of Job, like all satire, is reform. In particular, the book of Job challenges the view that suffering is necessarily always a product of sin and that the poor and oppressed suffer because of their sins. Furthermore, I argue that a change in the blood-redeemer system is the reform that the satirist as a critic of religion hopes to bring about. I note here that the לֹא־יִשְׁלַח is important because the action of the לֹא־יִשְׁלַח neutralizes sin.

I now go on to discuss the transformation of biblical images and argue that the call for reform, in the book of Job, is answered in the Christ event. I argue that a significant meaning that is conveyed by the transformed image of the blood-redeemer is that forgiveness and Christ's sacrifice can neutralize sin. Moreover, in Christ's Resurrection it is evident that the elimination of sin leads to salvation.

2 Introduction—Typological Argument

In this essay I utilize a typological argument. Hence, I declare at the outset of this discussion that my argument comes from a Christian standpoint, and I acknowledge that there are other possible standpoints. In particular, I utilize the theory of Austin Farrer. To begin with, Farrer stresses that the Bible imparts meaning by way of literary styles, e.g., poetry, narrative history, and not often by way of a reasoned argument. Furthermore, images are understood to work in accordance with, what he calls, the laws of imagery and not principles of abstract thought.⁷ This is particularly relevant as far as the book of Job is concerned, given that the representation of God in this book is, in fact, an image of God and not an abstract argument about the nature of God. Job's request for a blood avenger to kill God is also represented in ironic language, so too, the redeeming image of God in the New Testament. For example, the reform of the image of kings is had by way of irony, i.e., the title on the cross that reads, "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" (e.g., John 19:19) is intended to be a mockery (at the explicit level of the narrative); however, ironically, at the implicit level of the narrative the title does in fact declare the truth—that Jesus is King—though the truth is that Jesus transforms kingship and is not a king in the same sense as David, for example.⁸

7 Austin Farrer, "The Glass of Vision," Part 1 in *Scripture, Metaphysics, and Poetry: Austin Farrer's The Glass of Vision with Critical Commentary*, ed. Robert MacSwain (London: Routledge, 2016), 34.

8 N. T. Wright, *How God Became King: The Forgotten Story of the Gospels* (New York: HarperCollins, 2012), Chapter 10.

Central to Farrer's theory is the claim that the words of the apostles transform images from the Hebrew Bible in the light of Christ's incarnation. This transformation occurs in response to the prophets in the Hebrew Bible who rail against corruption and call for reform.⁹ In line with Farrer, I argue that the answer to the satirical call for reform in Job finds its full expression in the Christ event. Moreover, I claim that the main image that is transformed by the Christ event is the image of the blood-redeemer. In short, Job calls for a blood redeemer to kill God. However, in the Passion narratives, Jesus redeems us by the price of his own blood and in doing so transforms, indeed, makes redundant the role of the blood redeemer. Moreover, in the Christ event we see that God suffers innocently, in order to pay the price of the sin of the unrighteous, which is antithetical to the argument that God afflicts the innocent unjustly in the book of Job. I note, if the image of God in the book of Job is understood to be ironic (or otherwise neutralized), then there is no inconsistency between the accounts in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament.

In line with Farrer's conditions for typology, I argue that the narratives in the Hebrew Bible, being narratives that exist in history, must be cogent in and of themselves while also pointing to a greater awareness of the eternal presence of God. In relation to the book of Job and the call for a "redeemer" (or לֹאֵל) the "redeemer" must be cogent in the narrative, but the story must also be elevated by knowledge of the Christ event. I argue, this is where many scholars who apply a typological approach to the book of Job suffer. Generally, these scholars interpret Job as a character who has been wronged by God but who is also calling for God's judgement.

As mentioned earlier, I argue that Job calls for a blood-redeemer to kill God. I also claim that this is absurd and, therefore, that Job's understanding of his situation must, in fact, be a misunderstanding. However, in a twist in the Passion narratives (Matt 26:30–27:66, Mark 14:26–15:47, Luke 22:39–23:56, and John 18:1–19:42), some might say, Job effectively gets what Job calls for, that is, the death of God for the atoning of sins. Yet, a further and somewhat, ironic, twist is that it is Job's sins (and indeed all sins) that are being atoned for, not God's. This is perfectly consistent with my satirical interpretation of Job. Furthermore, the image of the blood-redeemer paying a blood price to God is reborn. In the same sense the idea of the blood-redeemer, who is an avenger who takes a price of blood, is finished. In its place, is the ministry and the sacrifice of Christ. By contrast with the blood-redeemer system, Christ calls for repentance, offers forgiveness and is the champion of repentant sinners—even Job.

9 Farrer, "Glass of Vision," 98.

2.1 *The Prologue of the Book of Job*

By many interpretations of the book of Job, the image of God in the prologue must be neutralized if we are to believe in a just God—if not by irony then by other means. Scholars have addressed this issue by, among other things, viewing the prologue as an independent source that could be discarded,¹⁰ (however, this would seem to make the story incomprehensible),¹¹ or by suggesting that the prologue should not be taken literally, but should instead be understood as setting up the dilemma in the narrative.¹² Typological approaches usually have a different approach, as will be outlined below.

As mentioned earlier, as a starting point for my argument I claim that the book of Job is a satire. I note that many scholars, including myself, have previously argued that the book of Job is a satire. Yet scholars who use a typological approach have not. Indeed, typological approaches, do not often consider the complexities of genre in their interpretations.¹³ As mentioned earlier, I claim that the so-called unjust representation of God in the prologue in the book of Job is, in fact, ironic. Therefore, by the likes of my interpretation, the prologue cannot be taken to be literally true or even to convey a true message in the explicit sense. Instead, I claim that the prologue is best understood as a mockery of the worldview of Job and his friends, i.e., that God's punishment is the cause of unjust suffering. Moreover, I argue that the presentation of God, as the cause of the suffering of the innocent, is ironic and that typological interpretations based on a literal understanding of God's nature, from the prologue of the book of Job, present an erroneous conception of God. I argue that when the prologue is understood ironically no such absurdity appears. By contrast, scholars with an interest in typology¹⁴ often do not consider the prologue to be ironic and instead try to exculpate this, seemingly, poor behavior on the part of God. These scholars often argue that an interpretation of the לֹאֵל as a "redeemer," and more importantly, as Christ the redeemer, ultimately removes the unjust representation of God's nature in the prologue of the

10 W. D. Syring, *Hiob und seine Anwalt. Die Prosatexte des Hiobbuches*, BZAW 336 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), 99.

11 Choon Leong Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, Illuminations (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 28.

12 Seow, *Job 1–21*, 28.

13 See Carol A. Newsom, *The Book of Job: A Contest of Moral Imaginations*, which highlights the importance of engaging with genre studies in biblical interpretation. I note here that my interpretation of the book of Job as a satire is very different from Newsom's interpretation of genre in Job.

14 Here I understand typology to mean that scenes or types in the Hebrew Bible prefigure scenes or types/antitypes in the New Testament. See Austin Farrer, "Important Hypotheses Reconsidered: VIII. Typology," *ExpTim* 67/8 (1965): 228–231.

story.¹⁵ In this sense the **לֹאֵל** is seen as a “type” of Christ. Yet, in this interpretation, the “redeemer” acts in the story as a *deus ex machina* might. For instance, in this interpretation Christ’s Passion may be viewed as a desperate and contrived attempt to exculpate the image of God in the prologue. Moreover, we are left with an absurdity in this typological interpretation, i.e., God the Father is unjust and requires God the Son to neutralize God’s own sin. Or at the very least, if it is not understood to be absurd, it is contrary to the common view that the members of the Trinity share one will,¹⁶ and the view expressed in the Athanasian Creed that all members of the Trinity are equal. Furthermore, this argument assumes that the book of Job does not have integrity without the overlay of the Christ story. This is problematic in as much as the book of Job, in itself, is understood to be Sacred Scripture and does not require correction from a typological interpretation. I note here that there are no negative conceptions of the nature of God in my interpretation. I do not make the Marcionite claim that the God of the Hebrew Bible is wrathful and angry while the God of the New Testament is loving and merciful. Instead, I claim a continuity from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament in the form of a positive call for reform, by way of satire (Hebrew Bible), and a positive response had by way of the Christ event (New Testament).

2.2 The **לֹאֵל**

The argument in this section of the essay is concerned with a typological interpretative approach of the book of Job in relation to the figure of the **לֹאֵל**. Notably, I argue that Job calls out for the **לֹאֵל** to avenge his perceived injustice at the hands of God. Indeed, if God is responsible for the extreme unjust suffering that Job endures, then the blood avenger would be required to kill God. In keeping with Habel’s view regarding the **לֹאֵל**, I argue that the **לֹאֵל** should be interpreted as a blood-redeemer. As mentioned earlier, many scholars who make a typological argument claim that the **לֹאֵל**, interpreted as a redeemer in this instance, foreshadows Jesus as Job’s hope for resurrection and eventual justice.¹⁷ In my interpretation the blood-redeemer in the book of Job foreshadows Jesus’ atonement for sins. That said, I accept arguments that the **לֹאֵל** in this case could be understood in the sense of the **לֹאֵל** in Deutero-Isaiah,¹⁸ i.e., God

15 For example, Jeffrey R. Holland, “Atonement of Jesus Christ,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: MacMillan, 1992), 82–86.

16 Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (Einsiedeln: Benziger Verlag, 1967), 45.

17 Christos, “Battle between God and Satan,” 286.

18 See Carroll Stuhlmueller, *Creative Redemption in Deutero-Isaiah*, AnBib 43 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970), 598. Many scholars have remarked that there is a relationship between the book of Job and Deutero-Isaiah. This parallel is said to be particularly

as Israel's Redeemer. In this sense the לֹאֵל is understood as God freeing Israel from the bondage of slavery (Isa 41:14; 43:14; 44:6; 47:4). Yet I argue that this interpretation may be considered as a double-meaning of the word לֹאֵל, i.e., although Job is calling out for a blood-avenger, it is ultimately a redeemer that comes. However, concerning the narrative in the book of Job I claim that Job is railing against God. Therefore, the interpretation of God as a "blood-redeemer" is preferred as the character Job's intended motivation here.

Furthermore, I argue, in line with Farrer's theory of the transformation of images,¹⁹ that the image of the blood-redeemer, and the associated concept in Job, that suffering is necessarily always caused by sin, is transformed in light of the Gospel accounts of Christ's Passion. Indeed, Jesus is an antitype of a לֹאֵל in as much as his action neutralizes sin. Yet as opposed to a לֹאֵל, he offers widespread forgiveness, and his own immolation, for the neutralization of sin. In doing so, as mentioned earlier, he renders the avenging role of the לֹאֵל to be redundant.

By contrast, many scholars of typology interpret Job as a character who has been wronged, by God. Therefore, Job is interpreted as a character who is deserving of justice.²⁰ As such, Christ's atonement is needed to exculpate God. Moreover, God's Resurrection is needed to give Job hope. In this sense, it is often argued that Job is calling out to Christ in 19:25.²¹ This argument is often strengthened by an understanding of the verse to read, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that he will stand on the earth."²² However, notwithstanding the ease with which this verse, in isolation, fits in with the aforementioned typological interpretation it does not fit in well with the surrounding verses. In Chapter 19 Job rails against God. Therefore, it does not make sense that Job is also calling for God to make a judgement in this situation, given God is the defendant, so to speak. Calvin's argument that Job is not a hypocrite because

evident in the story of Job as the "innocent" sufferer and the figure of the Suffering Servant (Isa 52:13–53:12). In many of these interpretations Job's suffering is consistent with the Suffering Servant figure. (For a full survey of these scholars, see the literature survey in JiSeong James Kwon, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016], 4–6). On the other hand, Kwon, argues that the suffering figure in Deutero-Isaiah is incompatible with Job (Kwon, *Scribal Culture and Intertextuality*, 45–56.). See Will Kynes, "Job and Isaiah 40–55: Intertextualities in Dialogue," in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katherine Dell and Will Kynes, *LHBOTS* 574 (New York: T&T Clark, 2013), 94–105; Kynes argues that Job parodies Deutero-Isaiah.

19 Farrer, "Glass of Vision."

20 For example, Holland, "Atonement of Jesus Christ," 82–86.

21 John Calvin, *Sermons from Job* (Lucie, FL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2011), 117–118.

22 Calvin, *Sermons from Job*, 117–118.

he rails against God in the midst of seemingly humbling himself before God,²³ is incoherent. By contrast, and as argued earlier, in the book of Job, Job calls for a blood-redeemer to kill God.

In the New Testament Jesus redeems us by the price of his own blood (Eph 1:7; Rom 3:25; 1 Pet 1:18–19), and, hence, renders the role of the blood-redeemer redundant. (I note here that the unfolding work of redemption is generally considered to be an essential element of a typological interpretation.)²⁴ In place of the blood-redeemer, Jesus redeems humankind. This change is distinct from the change in God's image and is in contrast to the interpretation according to which the image of God presented in the book of Job, as a God who afflicts the innocent unjustly, is transformed by the Christ event. For example, as hinted at above, it could be argued that the image of God as the oppressor of the poor and suffering is transformed into the image of God who suffers innocently. However, the image of God as the oppressor of the poor is not present in my ironic understanding of the book of Job or in an understanding of the book of Job as a satire.

2.3 *Is Job a Type of Christ?*

Many scholars argue that Job is a type of Christ; one could cite, for example, C. J. Williams,²⁵ Christopher Ash,²⁶ and Gerard Van Groningen.²⁷ Gregory the Great even claimed that Job's suffering was an embodied prophecy of Christ's Passion.²⁸ Ash argues that Job's life anticipates Christ's perfect obedience to God.²⁹ Yet this is questionable given that Job calls for God to be put on trial and, as I argue above, there is sufficient evidence to make an interpretation that Job called for God to be killed. These acts must be interpreted to be rebellious, even if it is so that Job stays steadfast to God in much of the story. By contrast, in the book of Job God is unfairly summoned to a trial; so too Jesus is unfairly tried in the Passion Narratives. Moreover, Jesus' ministry was focused on sinners and the poorest of the poor, the outcasts—the very people who are oppressed by Job and his friend's worldview. Take, for instance, this quote from

23 Calvin, *Sermons from Job*, 117–118.

24 Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture* (London: Hamilton, Adams and Co, 1886); Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (East Peoria, IL: Versa, 2014), 146.

25 C. J. Williams, *The Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

26 Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross* (Carol Stream, IL: Crossway, 2014).

27 Van Groningen, *From Creation to Consummation* (Dordt: Dordt College Press, 1996), 105.

28 Gregory the Great, *Moral Reflections on the Book of Job, Vol. 1* (trans. Brian Kerns; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 70.

29 Ash, *Job*, 15.

Gerald O'Collins: "Jesus' subversive wisdom contrasted the normal ordering of life on the basis of reward and punishment with the astonishing graciousness of the prodigal's father and the vineyard's owner."³⁰

Van Groningen argues that Job was a type of Christ because the respective sufferings of Job and Christ were comparable and because both were secure in the knowledge of God's sovereign power and righteousness.³¹ However, Job's suffering is not akin to Christ's suffering. They are similar in as much as they are both innocents who suffer. However, Christ is a moral agent who takes on suffering for a just outcome. Job merely endures suffering, which is an extraordinary state. Moreover, Job was not secure in God's sovereignty. Indeed, Job suggests that God is an oppressor. In fact, Job cannot believe God to be righteous if he calls for God to be a defendant in court.

In both cases the argued escalation of meaning, which is needed for a typological interpretation, is in fact false. For example, Ash and Van Groningen both claim that Christ suffers more than Job and is more obedient than Job, but this is merely a case of the same attribute being described with different intensity—not an escalation of meaning that requires more than this. Similarly, Williams claims that the pattern of undeserved humiliation and exaltation, which is commonly found in what he calls the Messianic Trajectory, is common to the book of Job.³² Yet, this also is different in the case of Job and in the case of Jesus. For instance, Job is not exalted he merely profits more than had before. A further claim of Williams is that the story of Job reflects the story of Adam/יָצָן and Jesus/יָצָן.³³ Yet the יָצָן in the book of Job cannot easily be identified with Satan in the New Testament.³⁴ However, it is correct to say that הַשָּׂטָן and Satan are both harbingers of suffering.

2.4 *Suffering and Sin*

There are many similarities, but also significant differences, between the book of Job and the Christ event. Namely, the Passion narratives present the image of a flawless God who suffers innocently, whereas the book of Job presents an image of Job suffering innocently but still being in possession of a worldview that causes suffering to others. I argue that this worldview must be reformed, and this process begins in the book of Job but reaches its full conclusion in light of the Christ event.

30 Gerald O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer: A Christian Approach to Salvation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 186.

31 Van Groningen, *From Creation to Consummation*, 100.

32 Williams, *Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job*, 16.

33 Williams, *Shadow of Christ in the Book of Job*, 33.

34 Samuel E. Balentine, *Job*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smith & Helwys, 2006), 53.

Moreover, the image of Christ crucified is not only concerned with removing negative conceptions of suffering and poverty but also with re-imagining God as one who suffers with us. The God who suffers with us is resurrected and we can imagine that we too will ultimately be removed from our suffering. This image of God brings hope to people who are suffering rather than shame which is the consequence of the worldview of Job and his friends. Furthermore, in the Passion narratives, God is revealed to us in the person of Christ, whereas God's nature is not entirely revealed to us in the book of Job.

Yet what is the re-creation here of which Farrer speaks? Certainly, the concept that suffering is always necessarily the punishment for sin is eliminated. After all, Jesus suffered greatly but was without sin. Thereby, the entire premise of Job and his friends is without evidence, as far as this case is concerned. Furthermore, the image of the blood redeemer paying a blood price to God is reborn. In the same sense, the idea of the **לֹאָלֵךְ** as an avenger who takes a price of blood is finished. In its place, is a redeemer³⁵ who calls for repentance, offers forgiveness and is the champion of repentant sinners.³⁶ Moreover, the redemptive value of this act is seen in Christ's Passion which is also salvific in nature. Hence, the importance of the theme of the blood-redeemer. For example, if sin leads to death then the removal of sin leads to life. To a certain extent the retributive system could achieve this by eliminating some of the causes of death e.g., by killing a murderer. However, as is evident in the book of Job, a retributive system is limited in as much as it cannot completely eliminate the mortal danger of sin. Moreover, as Ravasi argues, vengeance leaves a person in sin. Thereby, the system of the blood redeemer needed to be reformed. Certainly, there is some suggestion that the role of being a blood avenger left a person somewhat problematically tainted themselves.³⁷ Only in the Passion narratives is the mortal danger of sin ultimately eliminated. That said, it is evident that people must still suffer the effects of sin. It must also be argued that claims of Jesus' death as a penal substitution are in line with a version of retributive justice that is rejected in the understanding of the book of Job as a satire.³⁸

35 In the New Testament Christ is given the title of Savior but not Redeemer. In the New Testament Moses is given the title of Redeemer (Acts 7: 35). Yet Christ is given the title Redeemer in the theology of the fathers. See O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 5.

36 The role of the blood avenger in the Hebrew Bible was not a role of unfettered rage. Indeed, Barmash claims that blood avengers were somewhat idiosyncratic and sometimes behaved mercifully. However, there is also evidence to suggest that some blood avengers were unnecessarily violent. See Pamela Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 24.

37 Barmash, *Homicide in the Biblical World*, 24.

38 Comparisons have been made between the Passion and the book of Job regarding Psalm 22. Indeed, these comparisons are, in some cases, striking. However, it is a difficult task to prove any intertextual interdependence between the two texts.

2.5 *Sin and Redemption*

The cancellation of sin is no small matter in the Bible. Most importantly, sin is spoken of as the pathway to death. For instance, "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12). The remedy to the stain of original sin and death comes through being freed from the physical body and being united with Christ in the Resurrection (Rom 6:5–7; 6:8–10). Hence, the heredity stain of sin, a belief shared by Job and his friends, is finished in the Christ event. Furthermore, it is argued that sin prevents us from being united to God: "Unless sin is dealt with, any calling to share in the divine life will remain frustrated."³⁹ Hence, Christ's Passion allows for us to be united with God. Therefore, whereas Job could speak with God, in Christ all of humankind can be united with God.⁴⁰ This is a strong element of the suggested elevation of understanding in this typological argument.

However, redemption is not solely understood as the freedom from sin that is achieved by the Christ event. The Christ event also encompasses the Resurrection and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ These elements in conjunction with the removal of sin encompass the elevation of meaning that was mentioned previously.

3 Conclusion

In conclusion I argue, in line with Farrer's theory of types, that the image of the blood redeemer in the book of Job is transformed by the Christ event. I began by arguing that the book of Job is a satire, and as such, its' purpose is to call for reform. In particular, I argue that the book of Job presents a challenge to a strict and certain view of retributive justice, especially whereby it is understood that unjust suffering is caused by sin, and that all sin must be avenged by a blood-avenger. Yet, I also argue that the genre of satire has limitations. Importantly, satire calls for reform, however, it cannot, in and of itself, effect reform and in this respect is limited in its utility. In line with Farrer's thought, I agree, by contrast, that the New Testament images reform images in the Hebrew Bible by way of inspiration from, and participation in, the Christ event.⁴²

39 O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 45.

40 O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 68.

41 O'Collins, *Jesus Our Redeemer*, 45.

42 Albeit reform, in a more general sense, can occur by other means and is not reserved for the Gospel literature.

As mentioned above, I claim that the main image that is transformed by the Christ event is the image of the blood-redeemer. In short, Job calls for a blood redeemer to kill God. However, in the Passion narratives, Jesus redeems us by the price of his own blood and in doing so transforms, indeed, makes redundant the role of the blood redeemer. I argue that a significant meaning that is conveyed by the transformed image of the blood-redeemer is that forgiveness and Christ's sacrifice neutralize sin. Moreover, I argue that Christ's Resurrection, and the elimination of sin, leads to salvation. By contrast, with many scholars who make a typological claim that the 𐤒𐤍, interpreted as a redeemer in this instance, foreshadows Jesus as Job's hope for resurrection and eventual justice, I claim that the blood-redeemer in the book of Job foreshadows Jesus' atonement for sins. Furthermore, I argue, in line with Farrer's theory of the transformation of images that the image of the blood-redeemer, and the associated concept in Job that suffering is necessarily always caused by sin, is transformed in light of the Gospel accounts of Christ's Passion.

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Mockery and Irony in the Psalms

Beat Weber

1 Preliminary Considerations¹

Irony appears to be trendy. A couple of years ago, Christy Wampole published a piece in the *New York Times* under the title: “How to Live Without Irony.”² According to her, irony has become the “ethos of our age,” with the Hipster representing the “archetype of ironic living.” As an earlier effective means of uncovering mechanisms of power, irony has now degenerated into a “lifestyle” in which commitment, authenticity, and seriousness are lost. With their help, distance is created so as not to feel the longing that smolders under a thin layer of fun.³

In the Bible—Old and New Testaments—there is no specific term for “irony.”⁴ This does not mean that the phenomenon did not exist. Biblical scholars have focused their research on irony within discourse and characterization in biblical narratives. Yet—might there be irony in the Psalms? Might biblical prayer be ironic? We can’t exclude this possibility, as the Psalms are not only prayer.⁵ Certainly the Psalms—apart from some paratextual elements (prescripts and so on)—may be considered “speech” in the sense of textual discourses or extracts of those. And speech is apt for ironic utterance. Therefore,

1 The study is related to the author’s status as a “Research Associate” in the Department of Ancient and Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Pretoria, Pretoria, South Africa. Thanks to Dr. Tobias Häner for the translation from German to English.

2 Christy Wampole, “How to Live Without Irony.” *The New York Times* November 17 (2012): <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/17/how-to-live-without-irony> (visited 11/09/2020).

3 Wampole’s essay has not remained uncontradicted; cf. the rebuttal by Jen Doll, “Irony’s Not Dead.” *The Atlantic* November 19 (2012): <https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2012/11/ironys-not-dead-long-live-irony/321348> (visited 11/09/2020).

4 In the LXX we find the noun εἰρωνεία once, in 2 Macc 13:3 in the meaning of “hypocrisy, cant.”

5 The psalms are not only prayers—at least if one understands praying as an invocation of God’s name (*invocatio Dei*) and as a discourse with God in the second person. Cf. the overview in this regard in Beat Weber, “Von der Beherzigung der *Tora* JHWHs (Ps 1,2) zur Darbringung der *Tehilla* JHWHs (Ps 145,21): Erkundungen und Erwägungen zum Psalter als Lehre und Lob,” in *Zur Theologie des Psalters und der Psalmen: Beiträge in memoriam Frank-Lothar Hossfeld*, ed. Ulrich Berges, Johannes Bremer and Till Magnus Steiner (Göttingen: V&R unipress and Bonn University Press, 2019), 25–27.

biblical discursive texts, particularly in the prophetic and Wisdom writings, are candidates for the exploration of irony.⁶

Regarding the Psalms of the Old Testament, commentaries here and there give some clues about irony; there are also a few essays on individual psalms.⁷ But the topic of irony in the Psalms has not become the object of a comprehensive study (so far).⁸ The present study offers a preliminary overview and does not intend to be comprehensive. In addition, there is no consensus about what the term “irony” exactly includes.⁹ Correspondingly, a variety of psalms are candidates for being regarded as ironic by readers and researchers. The poetic language of these psalms manifests a high degree of ambiguity.¹⁰ This is a further reason for being rather cautious about identifying irony in the Psalms.

In her lexicon article regarding irony in the Old Testament, Gisela Matthiae classifies the term “irony” into the broad field of “humour” and highlights the

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- 6 Cf. with examples Luis Alonso Schökel, *Manual of Hebrew Poetics* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto, 1988), 156–165 (“Irony, Sarcasm and Humour”). The classic treatment of Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1965), discusses propositions in Genesis (primeval history; Abraham; Jacob; Joseph), 1 Samuel (Saul), Isaiah, Job, and Ecclesiastes.
 - 7 The title-keyword search for “Ironie/Irony” in Beat Weber, “BiblioPss1990ff.: Bibliography of Psalms and the Psalter,” <https://www.academia.edu/5910732> (visited 11/09/2020), yields two results: an article on Ps 14 (Phil J. Botha, “Ironie as sleutel tot die verstaan van Psalm 14,” *SK* 16 [1995]: 16–27) and one on Ps 105 (Anthony R. Ceresko, “A Poetic Analysis of Ps 105, with Attention to Its Use of Irony,” *Bib* 64 [1983]: 20–46). About these and other cases in detail, see below.
 - 8 This is different regarding the broader field of ambiguity or polysemy, as regards which irony may be counted. On ambiguity in biblical Hebrew poetry (of the Psalms), cf. Patrick D. Miller, “The Theological Significance of Biblical Poetry,” in *Israelite Religion and Biblical Theology: Collected Essays* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 163–170; on examples of ambiguity in the Psalms cf. Paul R. Raabe, “Deliberate Ambiguity in the Psalter,” *JBL* 110 (1991): 213–227; Samuel Hildebrandt, “Whose Voice is Heard? Speaker Ambiguity in the Psalms,” *CBQ* 82 (2020): 197–213.
 - 9 An overview of approaches regarding irony and ambiguity and the use of these two terms in biblical research is offered by Tobias Häner in the second chapter of his study on these phenomena in the book of Job (cf. Tobias Häner, *Gottes Fragen: Ironie und Ambiguität im Ijobbuch*, Wien: Habil. masch. Universität, 2021, and his contribution to this volume). Häner postulates four basic characteristics of irony: 1. Covertness: indirect discourse, by which what is meant remains unsaid and therefore (to some degree) covert, as it is contrary or different to what is said; 2. Evaluation: What is meant implies a (mostly critical) value judgment; 3. Weighting: What is meant is more persuasive than what is said; 4. Intentionality: What is meant appears to be more plausible regarding the intention of the uttering than what is said.
 - 10 Beat Weber, “Toward a Theory of the Poetry of the Hebrew Bible: The Poetry of the Psalms as a Test Case,” *BBR* 22 (2012): 165–169.

nearness of mockery to irony (and satire).¹¹ This can be seen to be adequate for our field of investigation. In the Psalms, both phenomena—humor and mockery—appear separately, but also jointly. As we will see, irony not infrequently is accompanied by (subliminal) mockery. Therefore, both phenomena come into regard: the mostly salient mockery and the covertly operating irony.

2 Examination

The following examination is focused on the lexical field “laughing and mocking.” After an overview of the terms (2.1), we will take a closer look at some psalm texts and ask whether irony is involved (2.2). In the last section, some psalms are discussed that do not contain the mockery terminology but that nonetheless may include ironic statements (2.3).¹²

2.1 The Lexical Field “Laughing and Mocking”

Root	Lexemes	Occurrences in Psalms	Number
בוה/בז	בז “disdain, contempt, mockery” בוה G “to disdain”, N “to be treated with contempt, disdained”	31:19; 107:40; 119:22; 123:3, 4 15:4 (N); 22:7, 25 (G); 51:19 (G); 69:34 (G); 73:20 (G); 102:18 (G); 119:141 (N)	13
גדף	גדף D “to revile, speak blasphemously” האח “haha!” (cry of malicious glee [Schadenfreude])	44:17 35:21 (bis); 25; 40:16 (bis); 70:4 (bis)	1 7

11 Compare Gisela Matthiae, “Humor (AT),” *Das Wissenschaftliche Bibellexikon im Internet* 2009: <https://www.bibelwissenschaft.de/stichwort/21610> (visited 11/09/2020), 1.2.1. (fig. 1).
12 In the whole, apart from the list of “mockery” terms, the following psalms are discussed: Pss 1; 2; 14; 22; 35; 37; 49; 52; 59; 64; 73; 82; 105; 114; 137.

(cont.)

Root	Lexemes	Occurrences in Psalms	Number
חרף II	חרף G “to taunt,” D “to rebuke; confuse, frustrate” חרפה “taunt, rebuke, scoffing; opprobrium”	42:11 (D); 44:17 (D); 55:13 (D); 57:4 (D); 69:10 (G); 74:10, 18 (D); 79:12 (D); 89:52, 52 (D); 102:9 (D); 119:42 (G) 15:3; 22:7; 31:12; 39:9; 44:14; 69:8, 10, 11, 20, 21; 71:13; 74:22; 78:66; 79:4, 12; 89:42, 51; 109:25; 119:22, 39	32
ליץ	ליץ H “to scoff, taunt” ליץ “scoffer”	119:51 (H) 1:1	2
לעג	לעג G “to deride,” H “to scoff, taunt” לעג “mockery”	2:4 (G); 22:8 (H); 35:16? (G); 59:9 (G); 80:7 (G) 35:16? ^a ; 44:14; 79:4; 123:4	9? (8)
נאץ	נאץ “to taunt, spurn,” D “to treat contemptu- ously, blaspheme”	10:3, 13 (D); 74:10, 17 (D), 107:11 (G)	5
קלס	קלס “mockery”	44:14; 79:4	2
שחק (צחק)	שחק G “to laugh, deride”; D “to joke, play, dance”	2:4 (G); 37:13 (G); 52:8 (G); 59:9 (G); 104:26 (D)	6
הלל III(?)	תולל “scoffer” (?) ^b	137:3	1?

a Text-critically uncertain; often emended after LXX (לעגו לעג).

b A *hapax legomenon* with uncertain origin and meaning. Besides the meaning “scoffer” also “enslaver, tormenter” is proposed.

The chart does not provide a sharp delimitation of the phenomenon of “laughing and mocking,” as one might enlarge or shorten the list. On the one hand, one might add third-party quotes of mocking utterances (79:10; 94:7; 115:2 etc.),¹³

13 Derivations of the root קלל “to curse” (contrary to D “to bless”) come close (cf. Ps 37:22; 62:5; 109:28, as well as the euphemistic use “to bless” in 10:3).

occurrences of the locution “to stare at, especially to gloat over enemies”¹⁴ as well as gestures *in malam partem* that express mockery, scoffing, and so on (to shake the head 22:8; 44:15; 109:25; 112:10; to open wide one’s mouth against someone 35:21; to make mouths 22:8; to gnash upon someone with one’s teeth 35:16; 37:12; to wink with the eye 35:19).¹⁵ On the other hand, one might also reduce the list: Instead of listing all occurrences of the roots חרף II, בזז, בוז/בוז and נאץ, one might limit the chart to those cases that denote *verbal* utterings (“to mock, to taunt, to rebuke”), omitting those occurrences that refer to *mental* acts or states (“humiliation, disgrace” etc.).¹⁶ In Psalms 69, 74, and 79, both aspects are in view.

2.2 Examples of “To Laugh” and “To Mock” with and without Irony

In addition to the above summary of occurrences, I now wish to highlight and examine some examples.¹⁷

1:1	Praised as happy the man, / who does not walk in the community of the wicked / and does not tread (on) a way of sinners / and does not seat on a seat of scoffers. //	אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך בעצת רשעים ובדרך חטאים לא עמד ובמושב לצים לא ישב:
2:4–5	Enthroned in heaven he laughs, / the LORD mocks them. // Then he will speak to them in his anger / and his fierceness he will scare them. //	יושב בשמים ישחק אדני ילעג למו: אז ידבר אלימו באפו ובחרונו יבהלמו:
37:12–13	The wicked muses [evil] against the just / and gnashes against him [with] his teeth. // But the LORD will laugh at him, / for he has seen that his day will come. //	זמם רשע לצדיק וחרק עליו שניו: אדני ישחק לו כי ראה כי יבא יומו:

14 A verb with the meaning “to look” (נבט/ראה) combined with the preposition ב, cf. Pss 22:8; 54:9; 59:11; 64:9; 92:12; 112:8; 118:7.

15 Cf. Ernst Jenni, “Verba gesticulationis im Hebräischen,” in *Studien zur Sprachwelt des Alten Testaments*, ed. Beat Huwiler and Klaus Seybold (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1997), 156–161.

16 Mental acts are foregrounded in the roots בוש “to be ashamed” and בלם N “to be ashamed,” therefore they are not included here.

17 The Hebrew text follows the MT (BHS), the translation is more or less in line with Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen 1–111* (eVersion. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015; with detailed analysis of each Psalm). / denotes delimitations between colons, // between verses (sometimes not following the MT).

(cont.)

52:7–9	God himself will demolish you forever, / he will fetch you away and pull you out of your tent, / he will root you out of the land of the living. <i>sela</i> // Then the just will see [it] and will be afraid, / but they will laugh at him: // “Behold: the strong man who did not want to make / God his refuge! // He trusted the greatness of his wealth, / wanted to be mighty with his arbitrariness (or: with his doom).” //	גם אל יתצדך לנצח יחתך ויסחך מאהל ושרשך מארץ חיים סלה: ויראו צדיקים וייראו ועליו ישחקו: הנה הגבר לא ישים אלהים מעוזו ויבטח ברב עשרו יעז בהותו:
59:9	But you, YHWH, will laugh at them, / you will mock all the nations. //	ואתה יהוה תשחק למו תלעג לכל גוים:

We begin with Psalm 2: In it we hear the laughing of the LORD, the king of the heavens. It is one of the rare occasions where the Bible tells us about God's laughter (cf. Pss 37:13; 59:9; Wisdom's laughter: Prov 1:26; 8:30–31). The motive for this laughter is the coalition of the nations that is directed “against YHWH and his anointed” and that culminates in the quotation of the nations (Ps 2:1–3; similarly 83:3–6). The context makes clear that it is a laughter *in malam partem* (as in all occurrences of שחק “to laugh” in Psalms except in 104:26; 126:2). That the laughter is intended as derision is confirmed by the parallelism of the verb לעג “to deride.”¹⁸ Shortly afterwards the laughter and derision turn into a speech of anger (cf. 2:12, where the motive of anger appears in connection with the son/the anointed). The hubris of these “united nations” with their aspiration of detachment from God and his anointed—the secularization, so to speak—gives the background, as the subsequent speech of God confirms.¹⁹

Now, Psalm 2 is not just any psalm—it is significant even apart from its importance for Christological readings in the New Testament. It is purposely

18 Cf. similarly in Ps 59:9; Prov 1:26; 2 Chr 30:10.

19 Regarding the interpretation of the Psalm in the context of the contemporary globalization and (increasingly anti-religious) world order, cf. Beat Weber, “Einsichten in den Psalter als Buch der Heiligen Schrift—mit einem vertieften Blick auf Psalm 2 im Kontext der Globalisierung,” *Jahrbuch für evangelikale Theologie* 26 (2012): 14–18.

placed at the beginning of the Psalter and strongly connected with Psalm 1 (e.g., by the macarisms in 1:1; 2:12). The theme of mockery turns up right at the beginning of the Psalter, in 1:1. The root לִיץ (nominalized = “scoffer”) that is used here is synonymous with the terms in 2:4. Whereas in Psalm 2 the nations that rebel against the LORD and his anointed are the addressees of the mockery, in Psalm 1, on the contrary, the adversaries of the just (and in this sense also of God) are scoffers, sinners, and the wicked.²⁰ In the context of the book, due to the *juxtapositio* and in the course of reading Psalm 1 and 2 the righteous person, who is guided by divine instruction (Ps 1), is overlaid with the figure of the anointed one (Ps 2). Analogously, the wicked and scoffers are set in parallelistic relationship with the nations and their rulers who want to live “autonomously.”

From the opening psalm there is a trace of wisdom to the also alphabetic-acrostic Psalm 37:²¹ Whereas the righteous “meditates” (הִגֵּה) in 1:2 on the word of God, the wicked “meditate” (זָמַם) in 37:12 on something ominous about the righteous, combined with the aggressive gesture of gnashing their teeth (cf. 35:16). As in Psalm 2, a “laugh” is testified as a divine reaction in 37:13, because YHWH already sees the end of these evildoers (cf. 73:17–19).²²

As in many psalms, Psalm 52 is based on the triangular constellation: God—righteous—wicked. Here it is the righteous who laugh at the wicked because of God’s intervention (v. 8) and denounce in their speech his overestimation of himself and lack of trust (vv. 9–10). In 52:9 no wicked are mentioned, and instead of the usual term for “man” (אִישׁ), גִּבּוֹר “strong man” is used. This choice of words is likely to have an ironic undertone insofar as its imminent depotentiation makes him an uprooted, “weak man” (cf. 52:7).²³ This reversal is prepared, as it were, in the opening question of the psalm: “Why do you boast

20 With regard to the communitization there is a *gradatio* in Ps 1:1 as far as the emphasis is on the last-mentioned not-sitting-with-the-scoffers.

21 Cf. Beat Weber, “Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water ...’: Weisheitstheologische Wegmarkierungen im Psalter,” in *Ex oriente Lux: Studien zur Theologie des Alten Testaments* (FS Rüdiger Lux, ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2012), 299–300.

22 I can no longer see an ironic moment in 37:13—contrary to my assessment in Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen 111. Theologie und Spiritualität des Psalters und seiner Psalmen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), 179.

23 In Prov 24:17–18, “Schadenfreude” (different terms than those here are used) in the face of the enemy’s misfortune is rejected. One may ask whether the difference lies in the fact that here one laughs at his calamity, but in Ps 52 at his *hubris*. If so, this would correlate with the laughter of God in Ps 2.

about what is evil, you mighty one?!" (52:3). Here the adversary is addressed with the term גִּבּוֹר "mighty one, warrior, hero" that derives from the same root.²⁴ Walter Brueggemann and William Bellinger also expect irony and recognize it in further contrasts: "The assertion of self-sufficiency ironically will bring self-destruction ... The evil of the 'worker of treachery' will boomerang on the head of this 'hero'."²⁵

Now to Psalm 59. As in 2:4, in 59:9 the verbs "laugh" and "mock" appear synonymously in the two cola of the same verse.²⁶ In both texts God is the subject, and his laughter happens "over them" (לָמוֹ). At the end of the verse, "they"—as in 59:6—are referred to as "all nations" (כָּל-גּוֹיִם). This word for foreign nations is also found in 2:1 at the beginning of the Psalm as the first subject (and later again in 2:8). In Psalm 2 it is used for the foreign nations (and their rulers) against whom laughter and mockery are directed. In Psalm 59, however, utterances that make one think of foreign nations alternate with those where adversaries *within* the people are to be suspected (the latter are more in the foreground). This fluctuation between external and internal threats is interpreted from one side or the other. Other exegetes take an integrated view or relate the issue diachronically to one (or more) psalm revisions.²⁷ In the course of reading the whole Psalter, a close connection or even reciprocity of internal and external adversaries is foreshadowed in the book overture of Psalms 1–3. Incidentally, such an amalgamation is found in the reception of Psalm 2 by the early Christian community in Acts 4:23–30. There the Jewish authorities in their revolt against the Messiah Jesus are included among "the nations."

Whereas up to now we have been dealing mainly with statements about the laugh and mocking from the part of God or the righteous, in the following—related to Psalm 1—excerpts from two psalms are to be cited in which the righteous, and more precisely, those in need in Israel, experience ridicule and scorn from adversaries.

24 Cf. Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen 1. Die Psalmen 1 bis 72* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 240.

25 Walter Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, *Psalms* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 242.

26 The parallelization of the two verbs can be found in the Psalter only in these two occasions; beyond that they also appear together in Prov 1:26 and 2 Chr 30:10.

27 Cf. in more detail Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen 1*, 262–266, and Erich Zenger, "Psalm 59," in *Psalmen 51–100* (trans. and interp. Frank-Lothar Hossfeld and Erich Zenger; Freiburg i. Br.: Herder, 2000), 140–152.

22:7–9	But I [am] a worm and not a man [anymore], / a mockery of the folk and despised by the people! // All who see me mock me, / pucker their lips, shake their head. // “Roll [it off] to YHWH! May he save him / let him free him, because he [yes] has pleasure in him!” //	ואנכי תולעת ולא איש חרפת אדם ובזוי עם: כל ראי ילעגו לי יפטירו בשפה וינעו ראש: גל אל יהוה יפלטו יצילו כי חפץ בו: וירחיבו עלי פיהם אמרו האח האח ראתה עינינו: אל יאמרו בלבם האח נפשנו אל יאמרו בלענוהו:
35:21, 25	They opened their mouths wide against me, / said: “Haha! Haha! / Our eye saw it.” //	אמרו האח האח ראתה עינינו: אל יאמרו בלבם האח נפשנו אל יאמרו בלענוהו:
	... They shouldn’t be allowed to say in their heart: / “Haha! Our throat [is filled]!” / Not being allowed to say: “We have devoured him!” ^a //	אמרו האח האח ראתה עינינו: אל יאמרו בלבם האח נפשנו אל יאמרו בלענוהו:

a Translation (and exegesis) following Beat Weber, “Es gibt keine Rettung für ihn bei Gott!” (Psalm 3,3): Direkte Rede von und an ‘Widersacher(n)’ in den Psalmen,” in *Du aber bist es, ein Mensch meinesgleichen (Psalm 55,14): Ein Gespräch über Psalm 55 und seine Parallelen*, (ed. Andreas Ruwe; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2016), 212–214.

In his lament to God, the wretched speaker in Psalm 22—after the expression of confidence in 22:7–9—describes (for the first time) the incidents of hostile people and the resulting consequences. Behavior, gestures, and words of contempt and mockery are mentioned, and at the end of the stanza in 22:9, words spoken by opponents are recorded as quotations (convoluted speech). These words of adversaries are divided into two parts: First, in direct address (imperative) to the distressed, the latter is challenged to entrust his need to YHWH (cf. 37:5).²⁸ Second, as a result, YHWH is—without being addressed directly—called on by the adversaries to save the oppressed.²⁹ The reason for this is given at the end of the direct speech: God’s pleasure in the afflicted. In these inserted quotes of the wicked, mockery and irony are combined. By the fact that these words are brought before YHWH in prayer by the oppressed, the ironic mockery is unmasked and given over to God. The irony as the difference

28 A similar formulation can be found in Ps 55:23. Cf. Weber, “Es gibt keine Rettung,” 221: “When the formerly-confidant-now-renegade is the speaker, *contre cœur* the words get an ironic, even sarcastic coloring (perfidious hypocrisy: reference to God while at the same time surrendering the bond with the addressee).”

29 The jussives denote indirect requests. The reported speeches are probably best understood as mutual words among the adversaries.

between what is explicitly said and what is actually meant is manifest in both kinds of reported speeches of the adversaries. In a provocative way, “pious behavior” is imitated, or even aped. They are *true* words from the *wrong* people! In detail: 1. The challenge of the afflicted to seek rescue from YHWH is hollow, because they are sure of getting hold of him. 2. The indirect calls to YHWH to help the afflicted draw YHWH into their collective mockery. They utter the words with the confidence that God will not intervene. 3. The justification is also mendacious: that God has no pleasure in him is certainly their view; otherwise, he would not expose him to this need and to their aggression, leaving him without help. With this end of the speech and of the stanza, in which, contrary to what has been said before, both God’s (non-)action and the psalmist’s experience of lack of become the object of irony, the extreme point in the psalm is reached. Covertly, the temptation that the Psalmist himself has probably experienced is brought up: Has YHWH taken his favor from me and rejected me? (cf. Ps 77:8–10).³⁰ But the afflicted does not keep the stinging, heartfelt words for himself, but brings them to God in prayer as part of the description of his suffering. Returning to the direct address in 22:10–12, the afflicted takes up the key word “pleasure” and counters the word of the mockers with the profession of God’s solidarity and care from the womb.³¹ By this and by the aforementioned inclusion of the speech of the adversary in the prayer before God, the irony gets “exposed” and turned into the opposite: It is not the hidden meaning intended by the adversaries, but rather the literal meaning of the formulation that (*in bonam partem*) is foregrounded—as if the utterance was spoken by the afflicted himself and not—directed against him—by the adversaries.

In the second example, Psalm 35, a prayer for support in a legal dispute, there are also inserted quotations.³² Of these, 35:8, 21, 25 contain words of the adversaries. We focus on verses 21 and 25, which have to do with (mocking) laughter, expressed in the use of the interjection הָאֵלֵּיךְ “Haha!” In 35:21, this laughter of the enemies covers up the words of deception (cf. 35:20) and at the same time introduces the false assertion of being eyewitnesses (with regard to the offenses charged). Psalm 35:25 stands in the context of the request addressed to God not to let the worst come about (worst case scenario). The quotation of the enemy is hidden, as it is spoken “in their heart,” but is put into words before God and thus made manifest. In difference to the mendacious disclosure of guilt in 35:21, the elimination of the afflicted (as a legal punishment?) is described in 35:25 as if

30 I would refrain from psychologizing the adversaries by fictionalizing them from the start and viewing them as externalized projections of the fearful soul.

31 Cf. Weber, “Es gibt keine Rettung,” 210–211.

32 Cf. Weber, “Es gibt keine Rettung,” 212–214.

it had already happened. The metaphor of “eating” evokes the imagery of being devoured by predators. Psalm 35:24 makes clear that the words of the enemies, the realization of which YHWH may prevent, are underlaid with *Schadenfreude*.

The analysis of the textual evidence has shown that laughter and mockery in the Psalms need not go hand in hand with the use of irony. But as we have seen in Psalms 52 and 22, there is an affinity between the two phenomena.

2.3 *Other—Debatable—Cases of Irony in the Psalms*

In this third part we want to look at psalms (or parts of them) in which lexemes of laughter and mockery are not present, but the use of irony may be considered.

64:2–11	Hear, God, my voice when I complain! / From the horror of the enemy save my life! // Hide me from the conspiratorial group of villains / from the agitation of the evildoers! // Who sharpened their tongues like the sword, / drew their arrows, a poison-word, // in order to shoot at the upright in secret—/ suddenly they shoot at him without timidity. // They strengthen [each other] for the evil purpose, / report [about] secretly installing trapping sticks. // They said: “Who can see them?” / They planned malice: “We completed!” // A [well] planned plan: / Yes, [the] inside of a man, yes, [the] heart [is] abysmal. // Then God shot an arrow—/ suddenly there were wounds. // They brought down themselves (?); their tongues were against themselves. / Everyone who looks at them shakes [scornfully]. // All people got fear [/awe], / proclaimed the work of God / and gained insight into his work. // Let the righteous rejoice in YHWH / and seek refuge with him; / yes, let all righteous hearts boast! //	שמע אלהים קולי בשיחי מפחד אויב תצר חיי: תסתירני מסוד מרעים מרגשת פעלי און: אשר שננו כחרב לשונם דרכו חצם דבר מר: לירות במסתרים תם פתאם ירהו ולא ייראו: יחזקו למו דבר רע יספרו לטמון מוקשים אמרו מי יראה למו: יחפשו עולת תמנו חפש מחפש וקרב איש ולב עמק: וירם אלהים חץ פתאום היו מכותם: ויכשילוהו עלימו לשונם יתגדדו כל ראה בס: וייראו כל אדם ויגידו פעל אלהים ומעשהו השכילו: ישמח צדיק ביהוה וחסה בו ויתהללו כל ישרי לב:
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We may assume that Psalm 64 is based on a (heard) lament plea with a sapiential ending. The scheming conspiracy of adversaries is portrayed from the perspective of the afflicted who is reporting and praying. The psalm is characterized by analogy and contrast. Actions and fate of the adversaries are in line with a wisdom-theological deed-consequence nexus: God brings them down with their own weapons. The correspondences between drawing the arrows, on the one hand, and the oppressors' being suddenly hit by God's arrow, on the other hand (64:5–6)—including their sudden wounds and the falling back of the words (“tongue”) on themselves—are classified by Brueggemann and Bellinger as irony.³³ I am skeptical: The mirrored events are presented pointedly and are based on Israel's “doctrine of faith.” It seems to me that there is no covert meaning in play here. A trace of irony may resonate *in the way* in which the schemers are beaten with their own weapons: the adversaries boast that one cannot “see” (ראה) the trapping sticks they have hidden, 64:5–6); in the end they are “seen” themselves (ראה) and experience disgust (64:9). The request for concealment from the excitement of the “evildoers” (פעלי און) dissolves and is transformed into a public announcement of the “doing of God” (פעל אלהים), cf. 64:3, 10 (frame of the stanza). A clearer case of irony results from the following play on words with identical roots (cf. 64:5, 7): The description of the attacked as the “upright, blameless” (תם) is built from the same root as the adversaries' statement: “We have finished / completed (תמנו)!”³⁴ The irony is apparent in the reversal: God “has finished” with them (cf. 64:5, 7). This also confirms the integrity of the attacked person.

105:17–19, 21–22, 37–38, 43	He sent a man before them, / Joseph was sold as a slave. // They constrained his feet in chains, / his neck came [into] iron // until the time when his word arrived (“came”), / the saying of YHWH had purified him. //	שלח לפניהם איש לעבד נמכר יוסף: ענו בכבל רגליו ברזל באה נפשו: עד עת בא דברו אמרת יהוה צרפתהו:
	...	
	He made him LORD of his house / and ruler of all his property, // to tie his princes to his person (“neck”) / and he should make his elders wise. //	שמו אדון לביתו ומשל בכל קנינו: לאסר שריו בנפשו וזקניו יחכם:
	...	

33 Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 281–282.

34 It is uncertain how far the we-speech (enemy quotation) extends and from where the commentary by the psalmist begins; on the variants see Weber, “Es gibt keine Rettung,” 228.

(cont.)

He brought them out with silver and gold, / and there was none among his tribes to stumble. // Egypt rejoiced in their going out, / for a horror had fallen on them before them. //	ויוציאם בכסף וזהב ואין בשבטיו כושל: שמח מצרים בצאתם כי נפל פחדם עליהם:
...	
He brought forth his people in joy, / in exultation his chosen ones.	ויוצא עמו בששון ברנה את בחיריו:

Anthony Ceresko has spoken in favor of the presence of irony in Psalm 105, which is often referred to as a “historical psalm.”³⁵ The focus is specifically on the Joseph stanza (105:16–23). As an example he points out that Joseph’s feet were shackled and “his neck” (נפשו) was placed in iron (105:18). After his rehabilitation by YHWH, however, Egypt’s princes were tied to “his [= Joseph’s] neck” (נפשו, 105:22). The turn occurs when the word of God “came” (בא) to Joseph; his feet, which “had got into the iron” (באה), were released by order of the king whereas the princes of Egypt were bound to him (105:18–22). Joseph, sold as a “slave,” comes to Egypt as God’s messenger and becomes there a “master” of the king’s house (105:17, 21). An example from the final section of the Psalm, which develops along the triple use of יצא “to go out,” H “to lead out” (105:37, 38, 43): YHWH led the people of Israel out with silver and gold. When it is subsequently said that Egypt was delighted with “their going out,” this refers first of all to the horror (plagues) that thereby departed from them. The statement from the previous verse is of course still resounding, so that the “plundering” of the Egyptians of silver and gold is also called for.³⁶ Afterwards the joy of the Egyptians is doubled by bringing Israel out with joy and jubilation—both modal indications may be adduced to God and Israel.

One might add further, similar examples from Psalm 105. But instead, we may pause in order to ask how to assess the presented examples in terms of irony. Regarding the joy of Israel and its God as well as of Egypt in the bringing or rather going out of Israel, there is irony associated with the ambiguity of the cause of the horror or rather the entrainment of silver and gold, since the

35 Cf. Ceresko, “Poetic Analysis of Ps 105,” 33–36, 44–46.

36 In Exodus 12, too, the two narratives are close to each other: the horror that sets in at the death of the firstborn (vv. 30, 33) and the entrainment of silver and gold vessels (vv. 35–36).

horror experienced by Egypt does not bear “joy.”³⁷ In the other examples given, jokes, puns and contrasts play a role, but the hiddenness inherent in irony is lacking. In this respect, the phenomena in my view do not seem to indicate a targeted irony.³⁸

In view of Carolyn Sharp’s “ironic (re)reading,”³⁹ Psalm 73 would deserve a more detailed analysis and discussion than is possible within the scope of this article. Sharp develops her understanding of the psalm—deviating from the usual non-ironic interpretation—on the grounds of 73:17–28 and based on assessments regarding the sometimes difficult or ambiguous syntax as well as lexical, historical, inter- and contextual considerations. In doing so, she concludes that the first-person speech should be classified as implausible and duplicitous. In her view, Psalm 73 with its aporetic ending ironizes for a post-exilic audience both the narcissism of the individual worshiper of YHWH and the failure of Israel’s kingship. Distinctive locutions in 73:23–24 (especially “seizing by the hand”) suggest—according to Sharp—the speaker’s royal identity.⁴⁰ In contrast to the positive image of the king in Psalm 72, in Psalm 73 the actions of the king are rated negatively. Not only the sequence Psalm 72 → 73, but also the guiding position of Psalm 73 at the opening psalm of the Asaph group (Pss 73–83) is brought into play: “Psalm 73 has a crucial role in this alternating sequence. It inaugurates a dialectic that moves between divine abandonment and divine presence, in which competing views of history clash.”⁴¹ The concise presentation makes it clear that irony is not in view here as a figure of speech, but rather as a hermeneutical key for understanding the psalm as a whole. Sharp’s approach goes beyond the specific task of an appropriate interpretation of Psalm 73 and leads to the question of what irony may imply.⁴²

37 The element of joy on the side of the Egyptians is also the most salient difference over against the narrative of Ex 12:30–33.

38 Here I differ from what I stated in Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen* 1, 191, where I was (with Ceresko) “more generous” concerning my judgment on irony in the Psalm.

39 Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 220–239.

40 Based on the speaker’s statement in 73:23 that he “is constantly (תמיד) with God,” Sharp also takes into consideration that he might be a Levitic priest, but finally rejects the hypothesis. Yet, if one considers the asaphitic background (as does Sharp), an asaphitic Levite would be more plausible than a king (cf. the connection of the Asaphites with the ark and their theology of the name and presence of God; cf. 1 Chr 16:37 and Beat Weber, “Asaph im Psalter und in der Chronik: Erwägungen zu ‘Schnittstellen’, Trägerkreisen und Redaktionsprozessen,” in *Psalmen und Chronik* [ed. Friedhelm Hartenstein and Thomas Willi; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019], 356–361).

41 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 236.

42 I am skeptical about the interpretation of Ps 73 as well as about the extension of the term of irony in the sense of a hermeneutical attitude; similarly also Adele Berlin, review of “Carolyn J. Sharp: *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*,” *CBQ* 72 (2010): 129–131.

Finally, I want to mention briefly a few more psalms for which an ironic understanding has been proposed. According to Phil Botha, in Psalm 14 it is not the genre, but the irony based on polar figures that is the key to the understanding of the Psalm.⁴³ Concerning Psalm 114, the question in verse 5 is taken as an expression of astonishment and / or irony.⁴⁴ In Psalm 49, a wisdom psalm, moments of irony are assumed in particular in statements about mortality and the abandonment to death (vv. 10–15, 20).⁴⁵ In Psalm 82 the question of irony focuses on the accused “godly beings” (אלהים) who are disempowered and have to die like human beings (vv. 1, 6–7). If these are not to be understood as gods (who are responsible for other peoples)—which is the majority view—but as human rulers and judges, then the irony is even more accentuated.

We conclude our tour with a look at Psalm 137. Irony is postulated particularly in verse 3, where the Babylonian oppressors demand from the exiles—the “we” group in the Psalm (Levitical singers?)—joyful songs—the expressions are paralleled—by asking: “Sing for us a song of Zion!” (reported speech). Is the demand of the oppressors (mockers?) to sing joyous hymns to be classified as “scornful provocation”?⁴⁶ Or is it “highly ironic”?⁴⁷ Or is the irony residing in the fact “that singing of Zion is impossible and yet the psalm is in no way mute” and nurtures the hope for future songs of Zion?⁴⁸ Or are there “auch spottende und ironische Untertöne” in the contrastive use of the motif of “joy” (compare the two derivatives of the root שמח in vv. 3 and 6 and the two uses of אשרי “happy ...” in vv. 8 and 9)?⁴⁹ This last example demonstrates—again—two things. First, nuances, sometimes subtle, in the evaluation concerning syntax, socio-historical setting, and so on in regard to the often ambiguous diction of psalm poetry can easily lead to different conclusions. And second, it also depends on the (broader or narrower) definition of irony whether one should or might understand phenomena as intended or perceived irony.

43 Cf. Botha, “Ironie als sleutel.”

44 Cf. Uwe F. W. Bauer, “Eine literarische Analyse von Psalm CXIV,” *VT* 51 (2001): 307.

45 Cf. Pierre Casetti, *Gibt es ein Leben vor dem Tod? Eine Auslegung von Psalm 49* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag and Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), 59–60, 69–74, 82, 120, 131–138, 149, 159, 250.

46 Weber, “Es gibt keine Rettung,” 251.

47 Leonard P. Maré, “Psalm 137: Exile—Not the Time for Singing the LORD’s Song,” *OTE* 23 (2010): 121.

48 Brueggemann and Bellinger, *Psalms*, 576.

49 Beat Weber, *Werkbuch Psalmen 11. Die Psalmen 73 bis 150* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 335 (“also overtones of mockery and irony”).

3 Conclusion

Because of the proximity of “mockery” and “irony” in the Psalms, we analyzed both phenomena. It turned out that the presence of “mockery” or the like is easier to determine. The terminology is present in verbal as well as in nominal forms and may designate actions, facts or persons. Furthermore, mockery and derision can be expressed non-verbally with gestures, or these can accompany the corresponding speech. The motif is not dominant in the psalms, but it is also not uncommon. In addition, related utterings are also discernable where the relevant terms are not used (cf. e.g. Psalms 115: 2, 4–8; 135:15–18).

The matter is more difficult or blurred when it comes to irony. Irony participates in the subtleties of verbal communication, as it includes an element of covertness by concealing the meaning in its opposite. It is based to a large extent on a tacit agreement between the sender and the recipient about language, cultural codes, and cognitive skills. If these are not sufficiently shared, irony will not work but rather will be misleading and will likely be misunderstood. Even in contemporary use, irony is not always recognized.⁵⁰ It goes without saying that the detection of irony is much more difficult with the Old Testament, from which we are distanced in terms of time, language, and culture. In going through the Psalms we have come across different evaluations, e.g. regarding the presence of irony in Psalms 73 and 137. In addition, the ambiguity that is inherent in irony is rendered even more complex by the poetic expression of the Psalms, which itself is characterized by ambiguity and openness of meaning—and thus has the ability to interact with multiple contexts in different settings and times. Nonetheless, evidence has been presented on our way through the Psalter that indicates the presence of irony with some certainty. In other cases the matter is disputed. A start has been made and we are looking forward to future researches in this area. These will also have to deal with the question of whether certain genres, situations of speech, or contexts in the Psalms are more suitable places of accommodation for the exploration of irony.

⁵⁰ People who belong to the autism spectrum (Asperger's) have trouble perceiving irony as such. But they are by no means the only ones. Perceptibility also depends on the clarity with which irony is expressed.

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Ironic Contestations as a Care Strategy in Lamentations

Gregory Lee Cuéllar

The book of Lamentations solicits us to witness vicariously an array of lived experiences under empire. The unknowable events of Jerusalem's conquest (587 BCE)—both in terms of the Neo-Babylonian invasion and then the everyday lives of the colonized Judeans—are given some semblance of form through the art of Hebrew poetry. Contravening the paralysis of trauma in this way may register a desire for a healed state of being. However, such artistic maneuvers are nevertheless incomplete in their representation of imperial violence. Rather than surrender to a state of non-existence, Lamentations evidences the recourse to sacred poetry—both in terms of its theology and liberating potential—in order to forge a third way between the grotesque violence of empire-building and day-to-day coloniality. In other words, through sacred poetry the protracted effects of empire-building were both artistically and theologically ameliorated in a commanding way so as to work through the melancholy of victimhood with literary modes that reinvent, resist, and restore normative meanings. To view Lamentations as proof of artistic agency aligns with Irene Visser's argument that "postcolonial trauma narratives often also demonstrate that resilience and growth are possible in the aftermath of traumatic wounding."¹

Aside from the affective registers of melancholy and resilience, the poetry of Lamentations also affirms the power of the sacred, which in a postcolonial state of being demonstrates what Achille Mbembe calls "the poetic productivity of the sacred."² Here, the act of poetry-making itself is consecrated, particularly when it attends in liberating ways to the traumas of imperial violence, such as conquest and exile. In this way, the sacred becomes as Mbembe describes a source of "hope in a historical context in which violence has touched not only material infrastructures but psychological infrastructures too, through the

1 Irene Visser, "Decolonizing Trauma Theory," in *Decolonizing Trauma Studies: Trauma and Postcolonialism*, ed. Sonya Andermahr (Basel: MDPI, 2016), 12.

2 Achille Mbembe, "What is Postcolonial Thinking?" interview for *Esprit*, January 9, 2008, print, <https://www.eurozine.com/what-is-postcolonial-thinking/>.

denigration of the Other, through the assertion of the latter's worthlessness."³ In terms of the poetics of the sacred in *Lamentations*, this chapter focuses on how irony in this book models a mode of liberating care for those traumatized by imperial violence. For central to this strategy of care was not simply an affirmation of survival but a validation of human agency, resilience, and resistance in the midst of imperial violence and colonial subjugation. Through irony, in other words, the poet of *Lamentations* was able to counter the empire's system of representation by affirming and preserving a worldview untainted by imperial conquest. Here, the human agency of the poet was not content with just staying alive; instead, the desired aim was to advance the poet's wounded self beyond a melancholic state and toward healing and liberation from postcolonial trauma. This is indeed sacred poetry—when human agency reveals itself through modes of resistance such as irony in order to liberate the wounded self from the annihilating forces of empire.

1 The Ironic Melancholy of Acrosticized Trauma

A fundamental poetic device in *Lamentations* that demonstrates calculated artistic control is the acrostic. Rooted in the Hebrew alphabetic system of twenty-two consonant letters (א–ט), the acrostic governs the structural parameters and maps the semantic direction of the first four poems in *Lamentations*. This discursive strategy does more than reflect familiarity with a longstanding poetic tradition (e.g., Psalm 119). When taking into account the violence of empire-building and its ensuing traumas, the poet's repeated use of the Hebrew alphabet reflects a collecting scheme of not just letters but of what I call elsewhere "word-objects."⁴ Here, the acrostic allows for the mental possession of alphabetized words that, in turn, function as portals of entry to witnessed scenes of death (Lam 1:20; 2:4, 21; 4:10, 13–14; 3:46–48), rape (1:8–10), torture (1:11; 2:11, 19; 3:4–9, 52–54; 4:4, 9, 20), and city-wide destruction (2:2–10; 4:1). That is, serializing words with the acrostic confines their semantic function to their alphabetic relationship to each other. It is within this repeatable sequenced position that the poet is able to take mental possession of each acrosticized word-object. This discursive strategy resonates with Jean Baudrillard's theory of collecting, especially his argument that "both the

3 Mbembe, interview.

4 Gregory Lee Cuéllar, "The Collecting Impulse in *Lamentations*: Postcolonial Trauma Made Miniature in Word-Objects," in *Postcolonial Commentary and the Old Testament*, ed. Hemchand Gossai (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 275–289.

series and the collection serve to institute possession of the object—that is, they facilitate the mutual integration of object and person.”⁵ Moreover, if collections constitute what Baudrillard refers to as a “self-addressed discourse” (using objects to recite oneself),⁶ the poet of Lamentations who seeks refuge in a collection of acrosticized word-objects does so as a person wounded in a profound way by the imperial conquest of Jerusalem. This wound significantly nuances the poet-collector’s desire for acrosticized word-objects, such that their featured scenes of imperial violence are intensely personal to the poet-collector. Hence, the self-referential nature of the acrostics’ scenes of violence render the recourse to this collecting system less a product of what Baudrillard calls “a tempered mode of sexual perversion” than a therapeutic desire in which the possession of alphabetized word-objects acknowledge what is often unrepresentable of postcolonial traumas. For Baudrillard, the possession of objects (real or virtual) and the passion for them involved a fantastic love relationship between the collected objects and the collector. Walter Benjamin provides a fitting description of this love relationship, “the most profound enchantment for the collector is the locking of individual items within a magic circle in which they are fixed as the final thrill, the thrill of acquisition, passes over them.”⁷ Here the real referent of the collector’s love-gaze is not a person but the collector or as Baudrillard describes “the subject himself, collecting and eroticizing himself and turning the relationship of love into a discourse directed towards him alone.”⁸ Framed as a discursive strategy of self-care, however, it is then easy to see how rehearsing the sequenced acrostic order of word-objects (from א to ת and back again) would have facilitated the ancient audience’s mental possession in order to ameliorate the shock and absorb the anguish that attended imperial conquest and colonization. Drawing on Baudrillard, we may frame this type of investment in serialized word-objects as a refuge-seeking exercise or “a work of mourning” that involves “dispelling the anxiety associated with absence and with the reality of death.”⁹ But if, as Baudrillard indicates, “the collection represents the continual recommencement of a controlled cycle,”¹⁰ what is also rehearsed during each reciting

5 Jean Baudrillard, “The Non-functional System, or Subjective Discourse,” in *The System of Objects*, trans. James Benedict, Radical Thinkers (New York: Verso, 1996), 91.

6 Baudrillard, “Non-functional System,” 96.

7 Walter Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library: A Talk about Book Collecting,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt (trans. Harry Zohn; New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 60.

8 Baudrillard, “Non-functional System,” 100.

9 Baudrillard, “Non-functional System,” 97.

10 Baudrillard, “Non-functional System,” 95.

of Lamentations' four acrostic collections is the gory imperial violence that caused the initial wound. This compulsive replay of postcolonial traumas fits Dominick LaCapra's notion of "acting out" in which "tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene."¹¹ Herein lies the irony of Lamentations' acrostic ordering system, in that to cope with or work through personal post-conquest wounds, the poet turned to collecting word-objects not to delight in them but rather to inscribe them with the unbearable traumas of colonization. Indeed, the poet-collector caringly gives expression to unknowable traumas in an acrostic system of word-objects, even if this "system of possession" meant reliving over and over the traumatic events inscribed in them. Rather than allowing for what Baudrillard calls "the joy of possession,"¹² the seriality of the acrosticized word-objects seems to lead to repeated cul-de-sacs of self-care and then self-tormenting. Under a Freudian psychoanalysis, the latter action is understood as an attribute of melancholia, for as Freud describes, "the complex of melancholia behaves like an open wound," and causes "pathological mourning."¹³ As such, the object cathexis in Lamentations 1–4 is acrosticized words inscribed with scenes of imperial violence and its aftereffects. Here seriality functions less as a mark of literary design than a catalyst for the melancholic replay of postcolonial traumas. Barring intervention of another discursive strategy, the poet-collector's wounds would remain open wounds.

2 The Liberating Interventions of Irony in Lamentations 1

The self-referential nature of Lamentations' four acrostic collections insinuates a solitary discourse between the poet-collector and acrosticized word-objects. In other words, because this is a discourse that the poet-collector controls via the acrostic ordering system, the collected word-objects are initially obligated to address their creator. Here, their meaning and communicative function have been optimized within the imagination and conceptual vision of the poet-collector. And though as words they could communicate on a superficial level with non-creators, the world they have to affirm begins with that of the poet-collector. For while the poet-collector's recourse to acrosticized

11 Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Parallax: Re-visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 21.

12 Baudrillard, "Non-functional System," 98.

13 Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14, *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other (1914–1916)* (London: Hogarth, 1917), 250–253.

word-objects marks a solitary relationship with inanimate words, it represents a courageous step toward life. Although not an ideal form of life—the kind with meaningful human relationships—the poet-collector does avoid a postcolonial traumatic state of inaction. In the words of Baudrillard, “the collector is never an utterly hopeless fanatic, precisely because he collects objects that in some way always prevent him from regressing into the ultimate abstraction of a delusional state.”¹⁴ Even though the solitude that the four acrostic collections requires may be a regressive and triggering action for the poet-collector—such that word-objects inscribed with trauma were privileged over human relationships—what this collecting endeavor clearly instantiates is the will to live another day. And yet, this survival move may have found temporary solace in the mental possession of acrosticized word-objects; rehearsing the imperial violence inscribed in them would also limit traumatic recovery to a melancholic state of being. In all, the life move that the poet-collector delineates here is severely circumscribed both by the recourse to collecting word-objects and then cycling through their inscriptions of imperial violence. But rather than succumb to this melancholic vortex of acrosticized word-objects, in which self-preservation ironically involved self-tormenting, the poet-collector intervenes with simple irony to demonstrate that resilience and growth are possible in the aftermath of postcolonial traumatic wounding.¹⁵

Traditionally, irony is defined as a rhetorical figure in which the intended meaning is the opposite of that expressed by the words used.¹⁶ With its use in *Lamentations*, the poet-collector not only exerts control over acrosticized word-objects (a private discourse) but also over normative meaning-making (a public discourse). Through the use of irony, in other words, the poet-collector is able to create two or more disparate meanings in the text—as Debarati Sanyal defines it, “a dissemblance having a critical function in a context of shared beliefs [i.e. normative meaning].”¹⁷ Take for instance the first word-object in the first acrostic collection of *Lamentations*. In keeping with the Hebrew alphabetic system, the letter (א) set the lexical limits for the poet-collector, with the word-object of choice being the exclamatory interrogative (איכה)—translated “How!” This starter piece in the acrostic collection directs the imagination to the aftermath of imperial conquest in which the city (העיר), which from *Lamentations* 1:7–8 we learn is Jerusalem, was depopulated (ברר), widowed

14 Baudrillard, “Non-functional System,” 106.

15 Visser, “Decolonizing Trauma Theory,” 12.

16 *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st ed. (1933), s.v. “irony.”

17 Debarati Sanyal, *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form*, Parallax: Re-visions of Culture and Society (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 36.

(באלמנה)—in a figurative sense—and subjugated (למס). Here reciting the (א) word-object activates the seriality of the acrostic collection—a function that enables its mental possession by the poet-collector. On the other hand, tempering the joy of its ownership are climactic scenes of imperial violence, all of which would have been personal to the poet-collector.

Oscillating between the “thrill of acquisition”¹⁸ and triggering scenes of conquest, how can this tormenting exercise constitute sacred poetry? Conversely, what if the poetry of this sacred text lies not in its rhetorical design but rather in its liberating counter-discourse? Arguably, one discursive strategy that potentially offers the poet-collector a mentally freeing result was irony. In its simplicity, literal irony exploits the normative meaning of a word as a way to mean the opposite—appearing mainly in the form of correctives.¹⁹ For melancholy-inducing texts like Lamentations, normative meaning-making (shared beliefs) had been disrupted—if not destroyed—by imperial conquest. Thus, recalling the normative meaning through irony not only constitutes an extraordinary act of subversion to the empire’s system of representation but also has the capacity to create a mental outlet in the non-normal life under empire.

With the (א) word-object in the first acrostic collection, the poet-collector’s use of literal irony landed on the normative meaning of the city (העיר), which is defined in the text as a place that had been densely populated (רבתי עם) and hence great among the peoples (רבתי בגוים) and powerful as a princess (שרתי). For the first acrostic collection, the poet-collector’s rhetorical output—that is, parallelism, personification, alliteration, and so on—concentrate mainly on the city of Jerusalem, the principle site of personal wound. With the city’s conquest, the reigning empire had through physical violence redefined the meaning of Jerusalem for the poet-collector and the Judean people. What once was defined as a city with many people had now become a city without people. This raises the question, can a city be considered a city without people? Here, the empire used imperial violence to reconstitute the normal understanding of “the city.” But through literal irony, the poet-collector exerts control over the central site of grotesque violence and personal wound where all normative meaning had seemingly been destroyed by the empire. The irony, therefore, is found in the contrasting meaning of the word “the city”—a place without people. And yet it is also found in the normative meaning of “the city,” which here the poet-collector generously supplied. To call Jerusalem a city when in

18 Benjamin, “Unpacking My Library,” 60.

19 Katharina Barbe, *Irony in Context*, Pragmatics and Beyond, new series 34 (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995), 19.

reality it was no longer a true central city after its conquest, the poet-collector's irony (as in creating two disparate meanings) here seizes upon a domain of meaning-making that the empire had controlled. The poet-collector's literal irony not only admits to the obvious reality that Jerusalem was no longer the city it once was, but rather indirectly preserves the normative meaning of "the city" (Jerusalem), which in turn is a subversive act. Despite what the empire had done to destroy normative meaning, such that Judean cities were no longer cities as once before but now conquered cities, the poet-collector counters this physical and epistemological violence using irony and thereby restores to the imagination the normative meaning of the city Jerusalem.

By reclaiming the normative meaning of the city (העיר), the poet-collector forges a way out of the melancholic vortex of acrosticized word-object inscribed with imperial violence and postcolonial wounds. The subversive nature of this discursive move points to the poet-collector's sense of resistance and resilience. From the empire's vantage point, Jerusalem was not a thriving central city of the Judean kingdom but only a vassal-state on the margins of the Neo-Babylonian empire. To the empire, in other words, the city of Jerusalem was a conquered place and hence to recover what it had been before the conquest would have been counterintuitive to the empire's system of representation. Indeed, forced subjugation was the new normative meaning that the empire had imposed on Jerusalemites—a reality in which Judean people, places, and activities were marginalized. In view of this context, we can see how irony serves as a mentally freeing outlet both from the melancholic vortex of the acrostic collection but also from the empire's newly imposed normal. For whereas the acrostic collection may allow the poet to ward off despair, irony sets up the disruption of the empire's system of representation, which follows Kevin Newmark's definition of irony as an "interruption of any state of equilibrium whatsoever."²⁰ Just as the acrosticized word-objects reflect the poet-collector's will to live, the use of irony points to a redress and recuperation of a destroyed cultural reality. As such the poet-collector is showing not weakness but rather redress by contesting the empire's rule over reality. Drawing on Sanyal's literary critical work, I suggest irony here functions "not as an epistemological crisis or trauma, but as an exemplary mode of contestation."²¹ For where the acrostic collection resuscitates the poet-collector from the depths of nonexistence, irony serves as a powerful act of resistance to the empire's new normal. Moreover, recalling what "the city" once was—albeit ironically—also intimates a care function in

20 Kevin Newmark, "Traumatic Poetry: Charles Baudelaire and the Shock of Laughter," *American Imago* 48 (1991): 522–523.

21 Sanyal, *Violence of Modernity*, 12.

the sense that poet-collector's vision of Jerusalem is not just a conquered city. By reclaiming the city's former state, the poet-collector sets the standard for its future definition. In this way, Jerusalem is not limited to a destiny of permanent ruin but could one day be restored to what it once was—full of people, great among the nations, and a princess.

Although sparse in Lamentations, irony appears again under the (ב) word-object of the first acrostic collection. The word of choice for the poet-collector is the intensifying infinitive verb בכו, translated “weeping” or “to cry loudly.” In contrast to the (א) word-object in Lamentations 1:1, which features a panoramic scene of aftereffects of the conquered city, the (בכו/bitterly) word piece or (b) word-object features a scene of a private setting “in the dark” (בלילה), where the gaze is drawn to “her tears on her cheeks” (ודמעתה על לחיה), who is the personified female city Jerusalem. Here, the melancholic effects of the (ב) word-object are inextricably linked to a personal image of a familiar woman alone in the dark weeping aloud with tears flowing down her face. Indeed, this private scene tugs at the emotions with debilitating force, and yet it is irony again that intervenes, thereby rescuing the imagination from falling off the precipice of inconsolable grief. Compared to the first instance of irony, where the poet-collector reclaims the normative meaning of the city Jerusalem as a way to contest the empire's myopic representation of Jerusalem, the poet-collector contests the meaning of two sets of actors: (אהביה) “her lovers” and (רעיה) “her friends.” Targeting the meaning of these two actors seems to be directed less at the empire's system of representation than at the meaning-making changes that occurred in Jerusalem as a response to the empire's invasion.

With collecting as a subjective discourse,²² we can see how the acrosticized word-objects and their inscriptions of trauma in Lamentations represent personal investments on the part of the poet-collector. Their self-referential currency is implied in the strict ordering system of the acrostic, as well as in the panoptic and minute descriptions of imperial violence and postcolonial traumas. In its entirety, Lamentations elicits our empathy by articulating a deeply personal lived experience. Hence, the featured scene under the (ב) word-object of personified Jerusalem “weeping aloud” with “tears on her cheeks” has as its antecedents not only the public grief of the Judeans but also the poet-collector's personal wounds and sense of abandonment. Rather than stay in perpetual mourning, the poet-collector advances a way forward through irony. Here the symptoms of pain (weeping and tears) delineate a requisite domain of meaning for the poet-collector that indirectly counters this melancholic condition—the domain of “lovers” and “friends” (Lam 1:2). Just as

22 Baudrillard, “Non-functional System,” 106.

the imagery of the subjugated and abandoned city in Lamentations 1:1 makes “the city” the target of ironic contestation, the private grieving of a beloved woman warrants a similar mode of contestation that targets two sets of actors associated with consoling care, and because of imperial expansion this associated meaning has changed.

With the first set of caregivers, “her lovers” (אהביה), the poet-collector defines their normative meaning using the action word (מנחם) “comforting” (*piel* participle). Through irony, the poet-collector first had to affirm the normative meaning of “lovers” (אהבים) as actors who comfort in order to then negate this domain of meaning as a corrective measure (this aligns with Sanyal’s notion of irony possessing “contestatory impetus”).²³ Hence, the force of the rebuke—which is grounded in the negated or oppositional meaning of “lovers”—inversely serves to preserve the normative meaning of “lovers.” In the normal world of the poet-collector—prior to the threat of empire—“lovers” (אהבים) showed compassion (נחם), especially in times of grief and loneliness. The irony is that the “lovers” of lady Jerusalem had not offered her this corresponding action of consoling care and yet they were considered “her lovers.” The poet-collector’s use of irony would have us focus on the oppositional punchline—that is, what “lovers” did not mean. We must also not diminish the extraordinary sense of resilience that the poet-collector must have possessed to break from the melancholy—albeit briefly—by affirming a normal world where lovers do not abandon their loved ones in times of crisis, but rather comfort them with compassion and care.

The other contested domain of meaning in the poet-collector’s irony is “her friends” (רעיה). Again, the poet-collector sets the framework by defining the normative meaning of “friends” (רעים) using the opposite action word (בגדו) “they act faithlessly.” We can infer that the normative action for “friends” of a conquered person (in this case, the personified female Jerusalem) would have been to act faithfully, as conveyed in words like (אמת) “faithfulness” or (אמונה) “faithful.” In the normal world of the poet-collector, friends acted faithfully, especially in times of widespread tragedy. Because the corrective force of the poet-collector’s irony stands on normative meaning, the use of “her friends” here has a safeguarding function—as a kind of archive—of a world where lovers comfort compassionately and friends act faithfully. Here, the affirmation of the normative meaning of “lovers” and “friends” signifies a counter-pivot from the melancholic vortex of reciting acrosticized word-objects inscribed with scenes of postcolonial trauma. In this sense, irony allows the poet-collector to redirect the imagination to a normal world—that is, a more caring and

23 Sanyal, *Violence of Modernity*, 4.

compassionate world—beyond the one created by imperial violence and colonization. This discursive shift reflects not mere survival but more importantly possibility, resistance, and resilience on the part of the poet-collector. For in the normal world of the poet-collector, lovers and friends attended compassionately and faithfully to the wounds and tears of those conquered by empire. And any deviation from these normative caregiving roles was, in the poet-collector's world, assigned the label of “enemies” (לֹא־יָבִיטִים). In this sense, the poet-collector's ironic punchline extends to the domain of non-caregivers. The identity of such a group could be gleaned from the negated meanings that the poet-collector gives for “lovers” and “friends,” for they were the people who neither comforted nor aided those wounded by empire (as in the conquered female city Jerusalem). It was important to clarify exactly who such people were in the normal world of the poet-collector. In other words, people who failed to comfort and aid those violently conquered by empire were enemies, not lovers and friends.

3 The Ideal World of Irony in Lamentations 2

The final clear instance of irony occurs in the second acrostic collection under the (ס) word-object (i.e., Lam 2:15). As with the above word-objects in Lamentations 1, the collected acrosticized word first features a scene of public shaming in which all who travel by the conquered city (כָּל-עֹבְרֵי דֶרֶךְ/all that pass by) engage in hostile nonverbal gestures associated with derision and mockery.²⁴ In the normal world of the poet-collector, this was not a friendly, loving group offering actual words of comfort; rather, as conveyed with the preposition (עַל), their claps, whistles, and nods were not “for” the city but “against” her. As such, their position within the normal world of the poet-collector aligned more with the category of enemies than lovers and friends. To exert control over the melancholic affect generated by this shaming scene, the poet-collector shifts again to the use of irony. Here, the domain of meaning targeted for contestation was the conquered city Jerusalem—which by this point in the first and second acrostic collections has become the central site of the poet-collector's postcolonial wound. Yet different from the ironic contestation of “the city” in Lamentations 1:1, the poet-collector embedded irony in the dialogue of all the passers-by traveling by the city. This narrative move allowed the poet-collector to define the normative meaning of “the city” from the standpoint of this mocking group of itinerant hissers and naysayers. In this way, those perpetrating the

24 Adele Berlin, *Lamentations: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 73–75.

wound of public shame in Lamentations 2:15 played the role of indirectly affirming the normal world of the poet-collector, particularly as it pertained to the city Jerusalem. According to the poet-collector, they said, “This is the city that they said was perfection of beauty, joy of all the earth” (my translation). There are two groups represented in this brief dialogue: the shaming road-crossers and the third person plural subject in the phrase (שיאמרו)—translated “that they said.” Here, the latter group is cast as the stewards of the city’s normative meaning and the road-crossers are its contesters. This narrative dynamic expands the stewards of normative meaning beyond just the poet-collector, as seen in Lamentations 1:1–2. In this sense, affirming normative meaning is introduced not as part of the poet-collector’s direct speech but rather as part of the speech of two groups, the road-crossers (non-Judeans) and the “they” subject (Judeans). Moreover, their affirmation of the normative meaning of the city Jerusalem maps the poet-collector’s therapeutic vision which was beyond the self-referential and melancholic. The normal that the poet-collector seeks to preserve is an ideal world, where the city Jerusalem is perfect in beauty (Ps 50:2) and hence a place where people find joy. Moreover, because this was a standard that the city had once reached, there would always be the hope that it would reach this standard again in the future.

4 Conclusion

Perhaps the ultimate irony in the book of Lamentations is the poet-collector’s liberating break from collecting acrosticized word-objects—as Lamentations 5 attests. Though the scenes of imperial violence and postcolonial wounds persist throughout Lamentations, chapter 5 offers no dizzying dynamic of self-care and self-torment from which to escape—as in the four acrostic collections. Rather, it functions as a typical Hebrew poem with a definitive beginning and end. The exit that the poet-collector provides in chapter 5 does not seem premature, for it comes after a looping inventory (from א to ת and back again) of grotesque acts of imperial violence and postcolonial wounds. In this melancholic vortex, the poet-collector’s scenes of trauma are repeatable and oscillate between panoramic and micro vantage points. Indeed, very little seems to have been off-limits in terms of what the poet-collector expresses about the wounded self, for among the featured scenes of violence are acts of torture, rape, imprisonment, cannibalism, and death by starvation. Nevertheless, reaching such depths of the wounded self does not suffocate the poet-collector’s creativity; rather, the cyclical inventory of postcolonial wounds in the acrostic collections gives way to a final exit from the self-torment. In this way, the

poet-collector works through the postcolonial trauma by confronting its raw and messy depths—a practice that ironically opens the way for a final exit from the lament.

Creating sacred traumatic poetry—in which words are collected and irony is strategically deployed—represents an act of care that may prove helpful to those suffering from contemporary forms of postcolonial trauma. Here, I have in view the world's growing number of refugees, asylums seekers, and undocumented migrants—many of whom are migrating from former colonies of European empires. As in *Lamentations*, these groups have experienced firsthand the torture of human smugglers, the exploitation of the global capitalist economy, and the loss of cities and loved ones. On the level of trauma, *Lamentations* shares a troubling kinship with what these groups are forced to endure today. Hence, an important strategy of care that is often missed in commentaries on *Lamentations* is the recourse to artistic media such as poetry to express traumatic wounds. Secondly, collecting word-objects also functions as a care strategy against inaction. Though a limited strategy, collecting nevertheless offers the necessary spark of life to survive another day. For as the poet-collector shows us in *Lamentations*, the threshold of care that collecting sets for the sufferer is a melancholic state of being. This would not be an ideal final destination for refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants because it would potentially leave them in a permanent place of weakness. Hence, the poet-collector points to an important intermediate step that involves the subversive use of irony. Arguably, its therapeutic value has been demonstrated in how it allows the poet-collector to contest the empire's system of representation, particularly in the areas that contributed to the poet's woundedness. These ironic contestations move the poet-collector away from a place of weakness and vulnerability to a sense of agency, resilience, and resistance. Though the world affirmed in the poet-collector's irony was a world before imperial conquest, where Jerusalem had people, and lovers and friends were caregivers in times of crisis, reclaiming these domains of meaning has the potential to inform Jerusalem's future. In this sense, the poet-collector has created a source of hope that someday the city of Jerusalem would be as it once was, comprised of caring people, lovers, and friends, and hence a place perfect in beauty and joy. And yet the poet-collector provides a final step of care, which is to pivot away from collecting altogether and forge a final exit point in chapter 5. In the end, this is the ultimate remedy for the poet-collector's open wound: closure. Not closure to life itself, but closure to the pain of loss and the wounds of imperial violence. Finding such an exit remains the hope of refugees, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants, where there is closure to a world that marginalizes them, exploits them, subjugates them, and then annihilates them.

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Die Theologie des Buches Kohelet im Zeichen von Ironie und Ambiguität. Eine Skizze

Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger

1 Ironie und Religion

Ironie ist eine Form der Kritik. Die Kritik äußert sich nicht direkt, sondern indirekt, unter dem Anschein ihres Gegenteils. Ironie, so schreibt Hannele Kohvakka, „wird immer versteckt ausgedrückt und darf nicht zu offen signalisiert werden.“¹ Nach Bernd Willmes ist die Verstecktheit typisch für die Ironie. Deshalb „muss man mit Schwierigkeiten beim Erkennen von Ironie vor allem in historischen Texten rechnen, weil die Ironie das gleiche Hintergrundwissen voraussetzt.“² Um eine Aussage als Ironie zu erkennen, bedarf es auf Seiten der Aussage bzw. des Sprechers der Signale, die darauf hindeuten, dass eine Aussage nicht wörtlich, sondern ironisch zu verstehen ist. Auf Seiten der Rezipienten bedarf es der Fähigkeit, diese Signale zu erkennen.

In den Büchern der Gerichtspropheten findet sich viel Kritik an politischen, gesellschaftlichen und religiösen Zuständen in Israel. Auch dort dürfte sich die eine oder andere Form von Ironie finden. Doch das Gros der prophetischen Kritik kommt direkt und unverblümt zur Sprache. Deshalb sind die Bücher eines Amos, eines Micha, eines Jesaja auch relativ leicht verständlich. Auch ein moderner Leser versteht im Prinzip, was die Propheten meinen, wenn sie Ungerechtigkeiten und Missstände anklagen. Deshalb werden diese Bücher in den einschlägigen Themen der Theologie auch entsprechend zitiert, etwa die Sozialkritik eines Amos oder Micha.

Bei Kohelet ist das anders. Man weiß nicht so recht, was er wirklich meint. Zumindest ist das nicht so leicht zu erkennen. Hängt das vielleicht damit zusammen, dass seine Aussagen größtenteils ironisch zu verstehen sind? Lassen sich mit Hilfe der Ironie die Spannungen und Widersprüche erklären,

¹ Hannele Kohvakka, *Ironie und Text* (Frankfurt a.M.: Peter Lang, 1997), 208.

² Bernd Willmes, *Menschliches Schicksal und ironische Weisheitskritik im Koheletbuch. Kohelets Ironie und die Grenzen der Exegese* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), 28.

die in dem Buch anzutreffen sind und die der Forschung viel Kopfzerbrechen bereiten?³

Bevor ich einige Textbeispiele zur Diskussion stelle, möchte ich zwei Vorüberlegungen anstellen.

(1) Bernd Willmes geht davon aus, dass das Koheletbuch insgesamt „als ironisches Kunstwerk“ zu verstehen ist. Willmes schreibt: „Man muss das Koheletbuch insgesamt – von der Überschrift Koh 1,1 bis zum Schlussvers Koh 12,14, ohne literarkritische Verstümmelungen – als ironisches Kunstwerk ansehen, das von einem unbekannten Autor stammt, der in seinem Werk den fiktiven Sprecher Kohelet auftreten lässt, wobei unklar bleibt, ob mit der Figur Kohelet auf eine historische Person angespielt wird.“⁴ Meines Erachtens ist das nur möglich hinsichtlich der Rahmung des Buches, die Kohelet in die Nähe Salomos rückt. Ebenso ist die Einleitung der sog. Königstravestie in 1,12: „Ich, Kohelet, war König über Israel in Jerusalem“ ironisch zu verstehen, also nicht wörtlich. Die Salomo-Fiktion verleiht dem Buch ein ironisches Setting.

Dennoch würde ich nicht so weit gehen und das Buch insgesamt mit all seinen Aussagen als Ironie verstehen. Nicht alle Texte des Buches sind ironisch gemeint. Ich verstehe das Buch als einen Traktat, der sich an einigen Stellen des literarischen Stilmittels der Ironie bedient. Um eine Unterscheidung von Wolfgang Müller aufzugreifen:⁵ Kohelet verwendet die *ironia verbi*. Ob man darüber hinaus von einer *ironia vitae*, also einer Ironie als Lebensform, bei Kohelet sprechen kann, erscheint mir fraglich. Ob das Buch darüber hinaus von einer *ironia entis* geprägt ist, erscheint mir möglich. Hier würde ich eher von Ambiguität (Mehrdeutigkeit) sprechen.

(2) Ironie ist eine Form der Distanzierung. Man sagt das Gegenteil von dem, was man meint, in der Absicht, jemanden oder etwas zu kritisieren. Ich nenne ein Beispiel: Jemand stellt in übertriebener Weise ein frommes Verhalten dar, aber nicht, um sich damit zu identifizieren, sondern im Gegenteil: um es lächerlich zu machen, um sich davon zu distanzieren, um es zu kritisieren. Es wird also eine Distanz hergestellt zwischen dem, was gesagt und getan wird, und dem, was gemeint ist. Diese Form der ironischen Kritik ist in den meisten Fällen schärfer und gefährlicher als die direkte Kritik. Wenn jemand religiöses Verhalten direkt angreift, kann sich der Angegriffene direkt damit

3 Zu den verschiedenen Modellen der Erklärung der Widersprüche und Spannung im Buch vgl. Ludger Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 2nd ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2011), 64–69 und „Das Buch Kohelet,“ in *Einleitung in das Alte Testament*, ed. Christian Frevel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2016), 467–476; 470–474.

4 Willmes, *Menschliches Schicksal*, 52.

5 Wolfgang G. Müller, „Ironie,“ in *Metzler Lexikon Literatur- und Kulturtheorie*, ed. Ansgar Nünning (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2008), 333–334.

auseinandersetzen; er kann den Angriff, der von außen kommt, abwehren oder sich zurückziehen und schützen. Bei der Ironie ist das schwieriger, weil auf den ersten Blick ein Einverständnis suggeriert wird. Ich übernehme das Verhalten oder die Ansicht dessen, den ich kritisiere und erwecke damit zunächst den Anschein, dass ich auf seiner Seite stehe. Ich verhalte mich fromm oder zitiere eine fromme Aussage. Der Angesprochene fühlt sich bestätigt und verstanden, öffnet sich, doch dann kippt es plötzlich und die Ironie wird sichtbar. Es ist wie bei einer Umarmung, bei der ich die Person, die ich umarme, mit einem Dolch von hinten in den Rücken stoße. Die Umarmung tritt zunächst als Zeichen der Freundschaft in Erscheinung, erweist sich dann jedoch als dessen Gegenteil, als Ausdruck der Feindschaft.

Besonders im Bereich der Religion ist Ironie eine heikle und gefährliche Sache. Warum? Im Glauben geht es um eine vorbehaltlose Hingabe an Gott. Es geht um Ganzhingabe. Deuteronomium 6,4 wurde und wird zu Recht in diesem Sinn verstanden: „Höre, Israel! Der HERR, unser Gott, der HERR, ist einzig. Darum sollst du den HERRN, deinen Gott, lieben mit ganzem Herzen, mit ganzer Seele und mit ganzer Kraft.“ Die Liebe zu Gott, so deutet Origenes diese Stelle, ist ohne Maß. Die Liebe zum Nächsten hat ein Maß („Liebe deinen Nächsten *wie dich selbst*“, Lev 18,19), die Liebe zu Gott ist ohne Maß. Wenn nun jemand ein religiöses Verhalten in übertriebener, maßloser Weise darstellt und es auf diese Weise ironisiert, trifft er das Selbstverständnis religiöser Menschen in ihrem Kern. Deshalb gilt die ironische Religionskritik etwa eines Friedrich Nietzsche als besonders hart.

Es gibt prominente Exegeten, die Kohelet eine solche Haltung zuschreiben. Sie haben richtig gesehen, dass sich Kohelet auf eine bisweilen ironische Weise von zentralen Ansichten und Verhaltensweisen jener Lebenswelt distanziert, zu der er selbst gehört. Das hat Kommentatoren wie etwas Diethelm Michel und Aarre Lauha dazu geführt, Kohelet eine Haltung zuzusprechen, die in einer grundsätzlichen und radikalen Distanz zum biblischen Glauben steht.⁶ Die Konsequenz, die sie draus ziehen, ist logisch: Das Buch Kohelet gehört

6 Aarre Lauha, *Kohelet* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1978), 17: „Aber sein Gott ist nicht der Gott des israelitischen Glaubens: das Verhältnis des Menschen zu Gott ist bei ihm anders als allgemein im Alten Testament. Kohelet kennt jenen Gott nicht, der für den Menschen ein ‚Du‘ ist und mit dem man ein Gespräch haben kann.“ Diethelm Michel, *Untersuchungen zur Eigenart des Buches Qohelet* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1989), 288: „Ganz sicher ist, dass seine Aussagen über den Gott, der im Himmel thront und dem man nie begegnen kann, nicht zu vereinbaren sind mit dem, was sonst im Alten Testament über Gott gesagt wird: dass er sich offenbart hat, dass er handelnd und erwählend in die Geschichte eingegriffen hat und eben in diesem seinem erwählenden Handeln erkennbar und anzubeten ist.“

nicht in den Kanon. Es ist nur aufgrund eines frommen Nachwortes hineingerutscht. Der Sache nach zu urteilen, so Diethelm Michel, steht es außerhalb der biblischen Tradition.

Dagegen möchte ich im Folgenden die These vertreten, dass die Ironie Kohelets den Glauben davor bewahrt, in den Aberglauben abzudriften. Anders und grundsätzlich gesagt: Ein gewisses Maß an Ironie gehört zum Glauben, wie er in der Bibel bezeugt wird. Deshalb kommt dem Buch Kohelet eine genuin theologische Bedeutung zu. Warum?

Kann ein Mensch ein absoluter Ironiker sein? Das dürfte kaum möglich sein, weil er sich dann von allem distanzieren müsste. Er könnte sich auf nichts und auf niemanden wirklich einlassen. Er wäre lebensunfähig. Wenn jemand im Feld einer Religion als absoluter Ironiker auftritt, dann lehnt er diese Religion im Grunde vollständig ab. Er wird zum radikalen Religionskritiker. Aber auch eine solche Haltung könnte man wieder ironisieren. „Auch der Unglaube ist nur ein Glaube“ (Arnold Stadler).⁷ Der Furor, mit dem die Französische Revolution gegen die christliche Religion vorging, wirkt geradezu lächerlich, wenn man sie auf der Bühne entsprechend darstellen würde.

Warum gehört, um mit Kierkegaard zu sprechen, Ironie als Existenzform zum Wesen des christlichen (biblischen) Glaubens? – Um falsche Formen der Identifikation aufzudecken und aufzulösen und den Weg frei zu machen, der zum wahren Gott führt. Ich sehe also die Ironie in der Tradition der alttestamentlichen Götter- und Götterbilderkritik stehen. Die Kritik an den Götterbildern in Jes 44,9–20 weist viele ironische Züge auf. Doch auch mentale Vorstellungen und Konzepte in der „wahren Religion“ können zu Ersatzgöttern werden. Der sog. Tun-Ergehen-Zusammenhang unterliegt dieser Gefahr. Von daher dürfte es kein Zufall sein, dass vor allem dieses Konzept in der alttestamentlichen Auseinandersetzungsliteratur in den Fokus der Kritik gerät. Ironie hält also in einem religiösen Symbolsystem die Differenz zwischen Form und Inhalt wach. Religion bedarf der Form, will sie nicht versanden. Wird die Form jedoch verabsolutiert, droht sie den Inhalt zu ersticken. Eine Ironie, die religiöse Formen aufs Korn nimmt, sie also in überzogener Weise zum Ausdruck bringt, muss nicht notwendigerweise als Ausdruck einer radikalen Ablehnung von Religion verstanden werden. Sie kann dazu beitragen, eine Religion vor einem Selbstwiderspruch zu bewahren. In diesem Sinne verstehe ich Kohelet als einen relativen, nicht als einen absoluten Kritiker der Religion.

7 Vgl. Jan-Heiner Tück, ed., *Auch der Unglaube ist nur ein Glaube: Arnold Stadler im Schnittfeld von Theologie und Literaturwissenschaft* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2017).

2 Textbeispiele

Unter diesem Gesichtspunkt möchte ich nun einige Beispiele aus dem Buch Kohelet zur Diskussion stellen.⁸ Zu Beginn sei noch einmal daran erinnert, dass es äußerst schwierig ist, in historischen Texten Ironie festzustellen, da wir gewöhnlich nicht über das zum Verständnis von Ironie notwendige Hintergrundwissen verfügen. Anders gesagt: Wir müssen es uns erarbeiten; bis zu einem gewissen Grad ist das – je nach Quellenlage – möglich. Doch wir müssen damit rechnen, dass wir nicht alle Anspielungen verstehen.

1,1: Die Überschrift führt das Buch zwar nicht direkt, wohl jedoch indirekt auf Salomo zurück. Damit wird eine salomonische Spur gelegt, die zugleich einen ironischen Akzent setzt, wenn man davon ausgeht, dass die Figur Salomos zumindest in der Weisheitsliteratur durchgehend positiv konnotiert war. Im weiteren Verlauf des Buches wird jedoch deutlich, dass Kohelet-Salomo auf Grenzen stößt, sowohl Grenzen der Erkenntnis als auch Grenzen der Weltgestaltung.

1,11: „Es gibt nichts Neues unter der Sonne.“ Mit dieser Aussage übt Kohelet Kritik an der prophetischen Verheißung des Neuen. In diesem Punkt folge ich der Analyse von Thomas Krüger.⁹ Ich kann allerdings nicht erkennen, dass es sich um Ironie handelt, denn Kohelet äußert seine Kritik offen und nicht versteckt.

2,10b: Auf dem Höhepunkt der Königstravestie kommt Kohelet zu der Einsicht: „Meinem Herzen verweigerte ich keine einzige Freude, ja, mein Herz freute sich an meinem ganzen Besitz, und das war mein Anteil an meinem ganzen Besitz.“ Im Anschluss daran erfolgt ein plötzlicher Umschwung: „Dann wandte ich mich all meinen Werken, die meine Hände geschaffen hatten, und dem Besitz, für den ich mich abgemüht hatte, um ihn zu erwerben, zu, und siehe: Das ist alles Windhauch und Luftgespinnst. Es gibt keinen Gewinn unter der Sonne.“ Der plötzliche Umschwung bereitet der Exegese Kopfzerbrechen. Auf der einen Seite die Erfahrung der Freude, und dann der Umschwung: „Alles ist Windhauch und Luftgespinnst. Es gibt keinen Gewinn unter der Sonne.“ (2,11) Diese Linie setzt sich fort bis zu der Aussage, dass des Menschen Tage und Tun nur aus Leid und Verdruss bestehen (2,23). In der Exegese wird die Frage diskutiert, ob die Freude, von der Kohelet in 2,10 spricht, gar keine wahre Freude war. Handelt es sich lediglich um unterschiedliche Erfahrungen, die aufeinander folgen, wie es im Leben üblich ist: Auf eine Zeit der Freude folgt eine Zeit der Verzweiflung usw. Meines Erachtens löst sich die Spannung zwischen

8 Vgl. ausführlich zum Thema Carolyn J. Sharp, „Ironie Representation, Authorial Voice, and Meaning in Qohelet,” *BibInt* 12 (2004): 37–68, sowie die dort angeführte Literatur.

9 Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 169–177.

der Freude und der anschließenden Verzweiflung, wenn man die Aussage von 2,10b als Ironie versteht: Der König sagt zwar, dass er sich an all seinem Besitz freut; das gehört gleichsam zu seinem Amt. Aber in Wahrheit ist es ganz anders. Dem König wird das erst im Laufe eines Prozesses der Reflexion klar. Das Beispiel zeigt, dass Ironie auf der alleinigen Grundlage eines literarischen Textes tatsächlich nicht leicht zu erkennen ist. Würde jemand den Text auf der Bühne sprechen, könnte die Ironie durch Tonfall und Gestik deutlicher sichtbar werden. Vielleicht wird sie aber auch verständlich durch die grandiose Aufzählung der Großtaten des Königs in den vorangehenden Versen.

2,14: Ich gehe davon aus, dass Kohelet sich mit traditioneller Weisheit kritisch auseinandersetzt. Die traditionelle Weisheit kommt bei ihm in Form von Zitaten zu Wort. Die Zitate sind nicht immer leicht zu erkennen; in der Regel daran, dass sie in einem Widerspruch oder in einer Spannung zu anderen Aussagen des Buches stehen. Die Wahrscheinlichkeit, Zitate als solche zu erkennen, dürfte für zeitgenössische Hörer und Leser bedeutend höher gewesen sein, wenn man damit rechnet, dass sie einen ironischen Ton enthalten. Das trifft meines Erachtens in 2,14 zu: „Der Weise hat Augen im Kopf, der Tor aber tapft in der Dunkelheit umher.“

3,11: Bei dieser Aussage könnte ich mir vorstellen, dass sie ironisch gemeint ist: „Das alles hat er schön gemacht zu seiner Zeit. Darüber hinaus hat er die Ewigkeit in ihr Herz gegeben.“ Dass Kohelet hier auf den Schöpfungsbericht Gen 1 anspielt, ist unumstritten, auch wenn er den Vers Genesis 1,31 nicht wörtlich zitiert.¹⁰ Ich bin in meinem Kommentar davon ausgegangen, dass Kohelet die Aussage, dass Gott alles, was er gemacht hat, schön bzw. gut gemacht hat, ernst meint; dass der Satz also das sagt, was er meint. Freilich entsteht dadurch eine Spannung sowohl zur Fortführung in 3,11bβ als auch zum vorangehenden Vers 3,10: „Ich sah das Geschäft, das ein Gott den Menschen aufgetragen hat, dass sie sich damit plagen.“ Würde man Vers 11a als Ironie verstehen, dann würde sich die Spannung auflösen. Vers 11a würde dann etwas anderes meinen als der Satz dem Wortsinn nach besagt. Also wörtlich verstanden: Gott hat eben nicht alles schön gemacht zu seiner Zeit – wie auch das vorangehende Gedicht über die Zeit gezeigt hat. Es gibt schöne und eben nicht schöne Zeiten im Leben eines jeden Menschen. Vers 11a wäre dann ein Zitat, das Kohelet hier in einem ironischen Sinn aufgreift. Hier zeigt sich die Schwierigkeit, Ironie in literarischen Texten zu erkennen, die einer anderen Zeit und Kultur angehören. Würde der Text in einem bestimmten Handlungskontext vorgetragen, könnte man am Tonfall sehr leicht erkennen, ob die Aussage ironisch gemeint ist.

10 Zur Schöpfungstheologie bei Kohelet vgl. Fitschen, *Eine Gabe Gottes ist es: Schöpfungstheologie im Koheletbuch* (Berlin: LIT, 2020).

Dennoch zögere ich, die Aussage 3,11a als Ironie zu verstehen. Denn dann müsste man im Grunde alle positiven Aussagen in diesem Sinne verstehen. Also etwa auch die Aussage, dass Freude eine Gabe Gottes ist, dass der Mensch sich freuen soll alle Tage seines Lebens (11,8). Einige tun das, wie etwa Bernhard Lang. Sie verstehen den Aufruf zur Freude in einem ironischen Sinn. Meines Erachtens ergibt das keinen Sinn.

Wir stoßen damit erneut auf eines der Hauptprobleme der Koheletforschung: Wie lassen sich die Spannungen und (vermeintlichen oder tatsächlichen) Widersprüche des Buches erklären? Ich habe in meinem Kommentar mit zwei Erklärungsmodellen gearbeitet: Das eine ist die Zitatentheorie. Ihr zufolge zitiert Kohelet gegnerische Ansichten, um sie anschließend zu kritisieren und zu widerlegen. Ein zweites Modell rechnet mit verschiedenen Wahrnehmungsebenen. Um bei unserem Beispiel zu bleiben: Natürlich gibt es für jeden Menschen schöne und weniger schöne Zeiten; das Gedicht über die Zeit führt dies anschaulich vor Augen. Wenn es dann in 3,11 heißt: „Das alles hat er (Gott) schön gemacht zu seiner Zeit“, dann wird damit eine tiefer liegende Ebene angesprochen, die den Gegensätzen von „schön“ und „nicht schön“ voraus- und zugrunde liegt. Für dieses Modell gibt es in der Bibel wie in der religiösen Literatur zahlreiche Beispiele. Dies führt zu einem Prozess der Desidentifikation mit unterschiedlichen Widerfahrnissen und Wahrnehmungen. Sie werden im Hinblick auf eine zugrunde liegende Wirklichkeit, die ebenfalls der Erfahrung zugänglich ist, relativiert: Bei Kohelet ist es letztlich jene Freude, die Gott dem Menschen ins Herz gelegt hat (vgl. 5,19; 11,8). Ich würde also diese beiden Modelle (Zitatentheorie und Theorie unterschiedlicher Wahrnehmungsebenen) miteinander kombinieren.

Würde man 3,11a als Ironie verstehen, dann würde Kohelet im Grunde das in der hebräischen Literatur bezeugte religiöse Symbolsystem verwerfen. Er gehörte, um mit Diethelm Michel und Aarre Lauha zu sprechen, der Sache nach nicht in den Kanon. Versteht man jedoch 3,11 wörtlich, dann würde sich Kohelet viel stärker in die Tradition einfügen; er würde sie also nicht grundsätzlich verwerfen, sondern lediglich deren überzogene Geltungsansprüche kritisieren.

3,18: Das heißt nun allerdings nicht, dass ich dem Buch Ironie grundsätzlich abspreche. Es gibt einige Aussagen, die mit guten Gründen als Ironie zu verstehen sind, zum Beispiel 3,18. Hier geht es um die Sonderstellung des Menschen in der Schöpfung. In 3,18 heißt es: „Was die Menschen anbelangt: Gott hat sie ausgesondert ...“ Das Wort בָּרַר „aussondern“ bezeichnet in 1 Chronik 7,40; 9,22; 16,41 ein Aussondern im positiven Sinn, „die Erwählung zu einem besonderen (heiligen) Dienst“ (vgl. Neh 5,18). In Kohelet 3,18 besteht die Aussonderung der Menschen allerdings darin, zu zeigen, dass ihnen keine Sonderstellung

zukommt. Die feierliche Einleitung „was die Menschen anbelangt: Gott hat sie ausgesondert (hervorgehoben)“ weckt im Leser die Erwartung, nun würde Großes über den Menschen gesagt; doch es folgt eine Niedrigkeitsaussage: Die Menschen sind wie Vieh.

3 Fazit

Kohelet kennt das Stilmittel der Ironie. Er setzt es ein, um religiöse Praxis vor der Falle der Anhaftung zu bewahren. Typisch dafür ist die Religionskritik in 4,17–5,6. Sie läuft auf die Aufforderung zur Gottesfurcht hinaus. „Kohelet kritisiert die von der Tradition vorgegebenen Formen religiösen Verhaltens dort, wo der Fromme mit ihrer Hilfe über Gott verfügen (Opfer, viele Worte beim Gebet) oder sich mit ihrer Hilfe vor Gott aus der Verantwortung stehlen will (Nichteinhalten von Gelübden, Opfer für versehentlich Sünden). Davon hebt sich die Aufforderung zur Gottesfurcht ab. Mit *Gottesfurcht* scheint dann so etwas wie eine alle religiösen Einzelakte durchdringende, sie auf ihre ursprüngliche Mitte hin freilegende Haltung gemeint zu sein, in der Gott als der schlechthin Unverfügbare anerkannt wird, und der Mensch zu dem, was er tut, in bewusster Entscheidung steht.“¹¹ Ironie schafft Distanz. Im Buch Kohelet kommt sie zum Einsatz, um religiöse Praxis davor zu bewahren, in Fanatismus umschlagen. Nur so behält sie ihr Recht und ihre Würde. In diesem Sinne war Kohelet ein Weiser, der das Volk Erkenntnis lehrte (Koh 12,9).

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¹¹ Schwienhorst-Schönberger, *Kohelet*, 317.

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Hosting Its Own Otherness: Irony in the Book of Esther

Timothy Beal

On the Jewish holiday of Purim, people of all ages gather together, often in costume, for a *Purimspiel* (Yiddish for “Purim play”) to retell and reenact the Hebrew biblical story of Esther amid a racket of noisemakers and raucous voices. They cheer for the Jewish heroine Esther and the hero Mordecai. They jeer at the anti-Jewish villain Haman and his allies. Others, such as King Ahasuerus and Queen Vashti, often elicit mixed responses.

As in the story of Esther itself, celebrations of Purim also often involve a lot of drinking, attested as far back as early rabbinic tradition. Indeed, in the Talmud, Rava says that one should get drunk on Purim “until one does not know” (עד דלא ידע) the difference between the words “cursed be Haman” and “blessed be Mordecai.” Until, that is, one can no longer tell the difference between Jewish ally and anti-Jewish enemy, until the binary opposition of self and other, us and them, blurs and deconstructs.¹

Implicit in this rabbinic command is a profound acknowledgment of the deep and cutting ironies that run through the Hebrew biblical narrative of Esther. It encourages one to adopt a critical distance from the overt dynamics of othering that operate throughout the story, questioning whether they should be taken at face value. Indeed, we are commanded to impair our judgment, to confuse ourselves, about such matters, to question whether the other, the not-us, is truly, clearly, unambiguously other.

Irony, Carolyn Sharp writes, “hosts its own Otherness, showing that the said and the unsaid require each other.”² With irony, the said invites that which unsays it into the conversation; it welcomes the possibility of its own undermining. This is certainly true in the book of Esther, which Sharp rightly celebrates as the “pinnacle of dramatic irony within the literature of the Hebrew

1 Talmud Megillah 7b. For a fuller discussion of this rabbinic command and its implications for my reading of Esther, see Timothy K. Beal, “Introduction,” *Esther*, Berit Olam: Studies in Hebrew Narrative and Poetry (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999).

2 Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 21.

Bible.”³ From its opening verses, there is very little in the story that does not at least bear an ironic reading. Whereas King Ahasuerus’s extravagant drinking parties are intended to display his power, honor, and greatness, for example, what they reveal above all is the superficiality and fragility of his power. Likewise, whereas his dramatic overreaction to Vashti’s refusal to come and be ogled by him and his officials is intended to re-secure the patriarchal order of things in Persia, its effect is to expose deep insecurities in that patriarchy, especially in its royal masculine subject. Vashti is written out, *exscripted*, in order to reinscribe the law. But this exscription is also an inscription of her transgression and the threat to the patriarchy that it conveys, thereby exposing insecurities in the sexual-political order that is being presented, opening it to its own deconstruction. The story of Vashti’s exscription thus “makes a farce of the royal power it introduces, especially the king’s and Memucan’s consolidation of power in terms of sexual identity,” inviting “critical reflection on the problematics of identity-coded politics and the possibilities of political subversion and transformation introduced by those problematics.”⁴ Vashti’s erasure ironically reinscribes the masculine insecurity it is meant to overwrite.

And so the story continues, proceeding by way of misdirection, excess, ambiguity, and unsaying, making it nearly impossible to take anything straightforwardly.

1 **Fraught Mirroring**

I propose that the book of Esther also hosts its own otherness in another sense, as Rava understood: it uses irony to reveal not only the unsaid within the said, but also the other within the self and the self within the other, thereby subverting the very dynamics of othering that drive the story. In hosting otherness within sameness, and vice versa, irony in Esther invites critical reflection not only on how the identity politics of self versus other are constructed and maintained, especially in terms of gender and ethnicity, but also on how those constructions are always unstable and problematic, opening to subversion and social transformation. It does so, I suggest, through a dynamic of mirroring: otherness and sameness are mirrored in one another, eliciting a sense that whatever identity, whatever idea of self, is being presented as clear and normative is actually infused with an otherness that calls it into question. The image in the mirror is “fraught with background,” to borrow from Erich Auerbach’s

3 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 65.

4 Timothy K. Beal, *The Book of Hiding: Gender, Ethnicity, Annihilation, and Esther* (London: Routledge, 1997), 32.

characterization of Hebrew biblical narrative, in ways that host its own unsaying, its own other within.⁵

In what follows, I will highlight four instances of this sort of fraught mirroring in the Hebrew text of Esther: Vashti mirrored in Esther; Vashti mirrored in Mordecai; Mordecai mirrored in Haman; and anti-Jewish violence mirrored in Jewish violence.

First, the “other woman,” Queen Vashti, is mirrored in her replacement, Queen Esther. Vashti was banished for not reflecting well on King Ahasuerus, that is, for refusing to be the passive object against which his male subjectivity was projected and maintained. Ostensibly, Vashti’s removal creates the opening in the palace and in the narrative that Esther will come to occupy. Indeed, the king’s own continued obsessing over Vashti’s refusal and banishment after she is gone is what leads to the beauty pageant-like search for her replacement, who turns out to be Esther. Esther, then, is expected to be the woman-as-object that Vashti turned out not to be. Initially, the plan seems to have worked: Esther enters the story as the masculine ideal of a male-pleasing antithesis of Vashti.

But traces of Vashti remain. As with a palimpsest, her erased presence is still barely readable between the lines of Esther. Although not immediately apparent, these traces will come into clearer view soon: when, for example, Esther starts doing the commanding and Mordecai “did all that Esther commanded of him [צוֹתָהּ עָלָיו]” (Esth 4:17); and when she hosts her own drinking party for the king and Haman, during which she deploys her previously unknown Jewish identity in such a way as to upend their plans for Jewish genocide and throw their previously pleased male Persian subjectivities into turmoil (chapter 7). In addition to reinscribing patriarchal fragility, then, the other woman Vashti’s exscription leaves traces, erasure marks, on the woman who fills the space she had formerly occupied, traces that eventually reanimate in Esther her refusal to be projected as an object of exchange within the Persian patriarchal order of things.

Second, as I have argued elsewhere, Queen Vashti is also mirrored in Mordecai. The story in chapter 3 of Mordecai’s refusal to bow before Haman, to reflect well on him, shoring up his imperial Persian subjectivity (3:2–15), closely parallels the story of Vashti’s refusal of the king’s command to be the object of his royal masculine subjectivity (1:10–22). The parallels are clear: everyone is honoring Haman, as they had been Ahasuerus in chapter 1; Mordecai, disclosed as a Jew, refuses to be subjected to Haman, just as Vashti refused to be

5 Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (trans. Willard R. Trask; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 18.

subjected to Ahasuerus and his guests; Haman, who hates Jews, is enraged, just as Ahasuerus was in response to Vashti's refusal; Haman recommends to the king that a law be made that all the Jews of Persia, represented as singularly, threateningly other to Persian nation identity, be killed, much as Memucan had recommended that a law be made that all the women of Persia be subject to their husbands; Haman's recommendation is prefaced with "if it pleases the king," just as Memucan's was; the recommended plan of action is set in motion and Haman and Ahasuerus sit down to drink, much as the "pleased" king and his men settled back into their drinking party in chapter 1.⁶

As in chapter 1, then, the movement in this episode is from a powerful man's public exhibition of greatness, to the refusal by another to be subjected to him, to enagement, to a recommendation that will restore the former order of things, to the return of pleasure and drinking. Thus the woman-as-other, Vashti, comes to be mirrored in the Jew-as-other, Mordecai, encouraging readers to identify with both forms of otherness over against the Persian male subjects that project them as such.

The ironic effect of this fraught mirroring is to unsay and undo what the story's royal masculine subjects intend to say and do. Just as the new law in response to Vashti's refusal reveals instabilities in the patriarchy and its premier royal subject, King Ahasuerus, so too the law in response to Mordecai's refusal, calling for the genocide of all Jews, reveals instabilities in Persian national identity and its premier advocate, Haman.

Third, Mordecai is mirrored in Haman. Enraged by Mordecai's refusal to do obeisance to him, Haman generalizes from one Jew to all Jews, projecting them collectively as the main threat to Persian national unity and identity and calling for their total annihilation. He declares to the king, "One people diverge, scattered and divided among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom. And their laws are different from every other people, and they never do the laws of the king. And as concerns the king, there must be no willingness to tolerate them. If it pleases the king, let it be written for their annihilation" (3:8–9). Much like the rhetoric of Nazi Germany's "final solution" to the "Jewish question," which called for the systematic annihilation of all European Jews from 1941–1945, Haman's rhetoric here projects this "one people" as the sole threatening other to an otherwise unified and homogenous Persian national

6 For a closer analysis of the parallels, see esp. Beal, *Book of Hiding*, 53–58, and Timothy K. Beal, "Tracing Esther's Beginnings," in *The Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith, and Susanna*, ed. Athalya Brenner (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 87–110.

identity.⁷ Simultaneously “one” yet “scattered and separated,” the Jews are presented as paradoxically both singularly different and difficult to locate, identify, and distinguish from the rest of the population.

Yet Haman’s projection screen, casting Mordecai and his people as quintessentially other, not-us, is also a mirror. In fact, Haman himself is also an ethnic outsider to Persian identity, repeatedly described as “the Agagite” (3:1, 10; 8:3, 5; 9:24). As Jonathan Magonet writes, “When he speaks of the people scattered throughout the land whose laws are different from those of every other people (3:8), he is also describing, in a projection, some aspect of his own outsider status.” He is, as Magonet aptly puts it, “nothing more than the alternative face of Mordecai, a distorted reflection of the same character.”⁸ Haman’s projected image of Mordecai and all Jews as the quintessential other to Persian national identity actually mirrors Haman’s own identity ambivalence, as an outsider like Mordecai. Adorno and Horkheimer’s famous characterization of twentieth-century fascist anti-Semitism is apt here as well: “The portrait of the Jews that the nationalists offer to the world is in fact their own self-portrait.”⁹

Fourth, and most fraudtly, the violence planned against the Jews is mirrored in the violence enacted by the Jews. The dramatic reversal of fortunes in which the Jews “laid hands against those seeking their demise” was made possible, ironically, by the ambiguities and instabilities in the Jewish otherness projected by Haman. But this reversal opens onto the most cutting of ironies: the reversal of fortunes is also a role reversal. The Jewish people at risk of being annihilated as the threatening other within become the agents of annihilation, remaking themselves in the image of their enemies.

Several details in the text make it difficult to read the Jewish slaughter of 75,810 Persians in a straightforward way, without irony, as justified and even necessary self-defense, even if the initial decree is for them to “stand for” or “defend their lives” (8:11).¹⁰ Most obviously, the text describes the Jewish violence as unilateral, preemptive action. The Persians are not attacking them, at least not yet. Nor do they resist their attackers, let alone fight back. Indeed,

7 For an introduction to the Nazi “Final Solution to the Jewish Question,” which was the last stage of the Jewish Holocaust, see the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The ‘Final Solution,’” <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/introduction-to-the-holocaust>.

8 Jonathan Magonet, “The Liberal and the Lady: Esther Revisited,” *Judaism* 29 (1980): 175.

9 Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (trans. John Cumming; New York: Continuum, 1991), 168.

10 Insofar as the phrase “to defend their lives” is part of the initial published decree in 8:11, before the violence begins, one could argue that the killing escalated beyond the original intent of the law, in which case it would not be necessary to read this particular phrase ironically.

they are described as nearly paralyzed by fear (9:2). The fact that they were trying to pass as Jews (מִתְיָהוּדִים, literally “being Jewish” or “Jewing,” 8:17) to avoid being killed adds to the irony: in a sense, they are taking on the pre-reversal image of the Jews in peril.

Further encouraging an ironic reading of this reversal is what Sharp aptly characterizes as “a kind of semantic excess” in the description of the violence carried out by the Jews.¹¹ The repetitive summaries of their victories in chapter 9 are dense with verbs for killing: “dominate” (שָׁלַט), “lay hands” (שָׁלַח יָד), “strike down by sword wound” (נָכַה ... מִכַּת־חֶרֶב), “slaughter” (הָרַג; five times), “destroy” (הָמַד; five times), “hang” (תָּלָה), and “crush” (הָמַס). Such a surplus of terms for the violence flags this massive retaliation as excessive, even as it also mirrors the excessive, even farcical descriptions of the king’s drinking parties in the first chapter.¹² Whereas those drinking feasts were saturated with alcohol, these killing feasts are saturated with bloodshed.

As David Clines points out, moreover, the description in 9:5 of the Jews carrying out the violence “as they desired” (כַּרְצוֹנָם) is particularly unbecoming, suggesting a pretense of “godless license” comparable to that of enemies of the Jews in the book of Daniel.¹³ There, the same expression describes three different imperial powers: the unstoppable rampaging ram, a symbol of Persia-Media, who grew in strength and did “as it desired” (כַּרְצוֹנוֹ; Dan 8:4); another unstoppable Persian warrior king who rules with great power “as he desired” (כַּרְצוֹנוֹ; 11:3); and the king of the north, that is, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who occupies and profanes the Jerusalem Temple, doing “as he desires” (כַּרְצוֹנוֹ), considering himself to be greater than any god, and offending the God of gods (11:16, 36). As Clines observes, the reversal of fortune at the end of the story appears to be less about “sabotaging the power base of an alien authority” than it is about co-opting that power structure, uncritically and as-is, on behalf of the Jews.¹⁴ Whereas the characters in the story apparently do so unapologetically, with no sense of irony, it is nearly impossible for readers to see it the same way.

Note, too, that this same expression, “as he desired,” is also used earlier in Esther to describe Persian excessiveness during the king’s drinking parties. There, each guest is expected to drink without restraint “as he desired”

11 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 69.

12 On the excessive language describing the drinking parties in Esther 1, see esp. Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 16.

13 David J. A. Clines, “Reading Esther from Left to Right: Contemporary Strategies for Reading a Biblical Text,” *On the Way to the Postmodern: Old Testament Essays, 1967–1998, Volume 1* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 17.

14 Clines, “Reading Esther from Left to Right,” 16.

(Esth 1:8; כרצון), further highlighting the ways in which the Jews in the final chapters of the story are mirroring the Persian partiers in the opening chapter.¹⁵ In the process, the narrative elicits uneasy affiliations of sameness and otherness, us and them, in ways that continue to problematize any social-symbolic ordering of identity and power based on such binary oppositions, even when the formerly othered Jewish people have gained the upper hand.

2 Inviting Self-Criticism

Stan Goldman insightfully characterizes this ironic reversal at the end of the book of Esther as a kind of “generative irony,” that is, an “ironic generation of self-criticism,” because it invites critical reflection on the irony it is foregrounding. The irony that Haman and his allies end up reaping the whirlwind of destruction that they had planned for the Jews is undermined and subjected to criticism by the irony that the Jews, once delivered, end up behaving like their would-be killers. This double irony resists our desire as readers and hearers to reorient ourselves around their deliverance. It withholds the possibility of anything like a straightforward happy ending. Yet, because the narrative has been piling up irony after irony right to the very end, we find ourselves open to “the reasonableness of a further irony”: the unflattering portrayal of Jewish identity at the end of the story “invites Jewish self-criticism, a bold questioning of the Jewish self-image,” as well as the binaries of self versus other upon which it too depends.

Irony here produces a leveling effect: Jews behave like Persians, and Persians behave like Jews. Jews and Persians transform themselves into versions of one another, cancelling, ironically, the differences between them. ... People turn out to be not so easily divisible as we have been led to think. Who is a Jew? Who is a Persian? The irony of a Jewish writer raising such questions is itself an ethical act. This irony means that there is no superior race.¹⁶

Which brings us back to Purim, which is so often celebrated in ways that simultaneously highlight and mask the ambiguities and blurrings of identities,

15 See also Esth 10:3, which uses the verb form (רצה) to describe Mordecai, now second only to King Ahasuerus: he was “powerful” (גדול) with the Jews and “popular” or “desirable” (ורצוי) to his many kindred.

16 Stan Goldman, “Narrative and Ethical Ironies in Esther,” *JSOT* 47 (1990): 24–25.

playing at being other, hosting, as Goldman puts it, “ambivalent feelings of Jewish solidarity and self-criticism—sympathy and detachment.”¹⁷

Sharp has pointed out how irony also can be divisive, undermining social unity, insofar as it “deconstructs community through its performance of negation and through its fomenting of division within the implied audience.” The ironist, along with those with eyes to see and ears to hear their ironic observations, claims a degree of critical distance from the collective mainstream, “an evasion of full engagement in community life.”¹⁸ Ironically enough, taking such an ironic stance is another way of setting “us” apart from “them.”

Putting Sharp into conversation with Goldman, might we find in the Esther Scroll—and in Purim’s celebrative performances of it—a biblical tradition and scriptural practice that fosters an alternative kind of community, one that refuses to subordinate the divisiveness and indirection of irony for the sake of a unified front? A kind of community that remains open to ironic remove as an integral part of togetherness, cultivating an eye for irony? A kind of community, in other words, that listens for its own unsaying, that hosts its own otherness, that recognizes itself reflected in the mirror?

3 God as the Presence of an Absence

“I imagine Purim without the miracle of Purim,” says the minstrel Avramel in Elie Wiesel’s *The Trial of God*, which takes place on the eve of an anti-Jewish pogrom. “And I know everything.”¹⁹ The book of Esther is haunted by a long history of violence and bloodshed in which the Hamans of the world have gotten their way, in which no help comes from a queen, or a king, or a god.

The name Esther can be translated as a first-person form of the Hebrew verb סתר, “hide.” Esther: “I am hiding,” “I will hide.” The book of Esther is indeed a book of hiding. Its ironies are carried by interplays of hiding and disclosing, veiling and revealing. But the hiding is largely passive. Esther doesn’t actively *hide* her Jewish identity, for example; she simply “did not reveal” (לֹא־הִגִּידָה) her people or her homeland (2:10). And although Haman claims that Jews are the clear and singular other, entirely antithetical and threatening to an otherwise unified and uniform Persian identity, neither he nor King Ahasuerus know that Queen Esther herself is Jewish until she reveals, indeed deploys that identity in order to subvert their plans for Jewish genocide. Nor would Haman

17 Goldman, “Narrative and Ethical Ironies in Esther,” 27.

18 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 13.

19 Elie Wiesel, *The Trial of God* (trans. Marion Wiesel; New York: Schocken, 1979), 151.

have known of Mordecai's Jewish identity if others had not revealed it to him (3:6). Jewish identity in the story need not be actively kept out of sight. It is latent, hidden by default, and must be disclosed to be known. Which is also why, as noted earlier, Persians are apparently able to avoid being killed simply by self-identifying as Jewish (8:17).

Is God also hiding in Esther? God is never mentioned in the Masoretic Hebrew text of Esther (MT Esther), nor are any references to specifically Jewish religious practices. Still, can God be perceived between the lines, acting on behalf of the Jewish people? Does the text imply, as Jon Levenson puts it, "a hidden causality behind the surface of human history"?²⁰ And is that hidden causality supposed to be God, as many believe?

I do not believe so, and I believe that this theological absence is by design. Indeed, as Clines has argued, it is likely that MT Esther took pains to keep God out of it. When we compare this text with the Greek Alpha Text (AT Esther), which descended from roughly the same Hebrew proto-text, or *Vorlage*, it appears that the MT intentionally *removed* references to God. Of the nine theological references (to God or gods) in the main body of the AT, it is reasonable to surmise that at least some of them were present in the Hebrew *Vorlage* from which both it and MT Esther descended. If so, then MT Esther "represents a systematic attempt to remove religious language."²¹

The Esther Scroll does not simply hide God; it erases God. God remains in Esther, but only in the erasure marks—traces marking the presence of an absence, of a formerly present God. God as the presence of an absence.

Why? What is the significance of the absent presence of God in Esther? The question becomes even more acute when we consider the extent to which the text is engaged in intertextual dialogue with other biblical narratives in which God and divine agency are prominent (e.g., the Joseph narratives in Genesis, and the books of Deuteronomy and Samuel). What theological work might such an absent presence be doing in the story?

20 Jon D. Levenson, *Esther: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 21; also Frederic W. Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1996), 178.

21 David J. A. Clines, *The Esther Scroll: The Story of the Story* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), 107–113. On the genealogical relationships between MT Esther, AT Esther, LXX Esther, and their Hebrew *Vorlage*, see esp. Clines, *Esther Scroll*, and Michael V. Fox, *The Redaction of the Book of Esther: On Reading Composite Texts* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1991). Although they disagree on key points, there is general agreement on the following: the Hebrew MT and Greek AT are descended from roughly the same Hebrew *Vorlage*; the LXX is a Greek translation of the MT; and the six Greek additions to Esther were added to both the AT and the LXX. Therefore the AT (minus the additions) can be compared with the MT in order to hypothesize about their shared Hebrew *Vorlage* ("proto-Esther").

I suggest that this story's theological erasure marks collaborate with the generative irony called out by Goldman and Sharp. Its erasure of divine agency leaves us with a story that resists any kind of theological resolution that would not be uncomfortably ironic, any divine saying that could not be unsaid, that could not host its own otherness. The presence of God's absence, so haunting in the book of Esther, anticipates and preempts our desire as readers to seek out a divine agency to resolve the tensions and questions that the story leaves us holding. That is the kind of community, always attuned to and unsteadied by irony, that Esther invites us to imagine.

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PART 3

Irony in the Literature of the Prophets



An Ironic Overture in the Book of Jeremiah

Keith Bodner

Not only does irony abound in biblical literature, one might be so bold as to suggest that the identity of ancient Israel is forged in irony. In the early moments of the book of Exodus, the people of Israel are fruitful and proliferate, and soon the land of Egypt is full of them. But matters turn dark when the people are enslaved by a new king of Egypt, who attempts to destroy the future of Israel through a genocidal decree ordering that every newborn male be thrown into the Nile. When an Israelite male is unwittingly adopted into the royal household, a new hope arises for Israel replete with God's assurances to deliver the Israelites from oppression by the hand of Moses, who returns to confront Pharaoh and demand release. After a drastic series of plagues and ecological disasters, the Israelites are allowed to leave the country, only to have the Egyptian ruler change his mind and relentlessly pursue them to the edge of the Red Sea. With seemingly no way out, the waters are miraculously parted so the Israelites can walk through the sea on dry ground even as the Egyptian soldiers chase after them. The ironic reversal is complete when the parted waters collapse on the pursuing army of Pharaoh, and so just as the Egyptians tried to drown the hope of Israel in Exodus 1, they themselves are drowned in Exodus 14 as the Israelites press on toward the future in the land of their inheritance.

The ironic contours of retribution in the Exodus story may be clear enough, but for most readers it is probably easier to recognize irony than to provide a definition that covers all of its complexities. We can appreciate, to consider another brief example, the entertainment value of the narrator's carefully measured description of Absalom's hair in 2 Samuel 14, which notes that no other Israelite was as highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom, who cut his hair every year, and when he weighed it on the royal scale it exceeded five pounds. The copious hair of the heir proves costly, however, when his head gets caught fast in an old oak tree (2 Samuel 18) after igniting a bitter civil war that costs innumerable lives and nearly destroys his father, David. Of course, the narrator does not tell the reader that Absalom gloried in the hair that became the means of his downfall, but surely the reader is invited to draw such an inference. In an example drawn from New Testament narrative, Saul of Tarsus journeys to Damascus to arrest followers of the Way, only to be himself arrested (as it were) through an appearance of Jesus (Acts 9). A believer named

Ananias is called to pray for the blinded Saul; Ananias may have needed to flee to Damascus in the first place because of Saul's persecution. In the Acts narrative, a broader irony is apparent: the most vicious and hostile opponent of the emerging Christian faith soon becomes the most well-travelled and articulate apologist for the same movement he had tried so fervently to destroy.

In each of these examples the reader is invited to experience a certain literary richness and re-read the texts in light of major ironic moments that are part of the larger message of the story. While conceding that definitions of irony have proven to be notoriously elusive, standard attempts usually distinguish between verbal and situational irony, with the latter including matters such as a reversal and/or an unmasking of a character or circumstance, a discrepancy in knowledge at several different levels or between the reader and the actor(s) in the drama, or a surprising subversion of an expected resolution.¹ On the basis of this provisional definition it can nonetheless be stated with confidence that prophetic literature in general—and the book of Jeremiah in particular—is replete with irony. Indeed, I would argue that the book of Jeremiah is a literary masterpiece, with its combination of poetry and prose, a rich array of characters in a variety of different kinds of scenes, and the architecture of the book as a tapestry of judgment and hope.² This essay will explore aspects of the opening chapter of Jeremiah and suggest that it functions—among other things—as *an ironic overture* to the book, since numerous elements are introduced in this chapter that prepare the reader for a host of ironic experiences that will unfold over the course of the book. Here is my rough translation of key verses in the opening chapter:

The word of the LORD came to me, saying:
 “Before I crafted you in the belly
 I have known you
 Before you came forth from the womb
 I set you apart
 As a prophet to the nations
 I have given you.”

1 I am drawing variously on works such as Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), Tom Thatcher, “The Sabbath Trick: Unstable Irony in the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 76 (1999): 53–77, and David V. Urban, “Irony,” in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, general editor Kevin J. Vanhoozer, associate editors Craig G. Bartholomew, Daniel J. Treier, and N. T. Wright (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 334–336.

2 On the structure, see especially Louis Stulman, *Jeremiah*, AOTC (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2005), 11–16.

Then I said:

“Alas, O Sovereign LORD!

Behold, I know not how to speak

For I am a youth!”

The LORD said to me:

“Do not say ‘I am a youth!’

Indeed, everywhere that I send

You will go

Everything I command you

You will speak.

Do not fear *their* faces,

For *I* am with you, to rescue you,” affirms the LORD.

Like the other major prophets, the book of Jeremiah begins with a historical prologue that situates the life and times of the prophet, in this case, the last kings of Judah before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem. The era of Josiah is pictured as an era of reform in 2 Kings 22–23, but more complex tensions are reflected in the book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah is called to the prophetic vocation during this stressful period, and we note from the outset a deeply personal interaction between God and the prophet, implying that the reader will be a firsthand witness to many such conversations, struggles, and instances of divine encouragement and challenge. The cryptic reference to the kingdoms of the north suggests that Judah and Jerusalem are not the only focal points of the book, but other nations and people groups will be featured as well. Furthermore, the incremental advance of the evil from the north will not be the only source of opposition in the book, as the divine word to Jeremiah about the people of the land fighting against him—yet ultimately without success—introduces the notion of strong conflict within the Judean community. Jerusalem is about to be destroyed by a deadly foe from the north, but clashes within the people of God that take place on the streets of Jerusalem will prove equally devastating. When God informs Jeremiah that he is an iron pillar who will not be destroyed despite severe hostility, we conclude that contained in this book is a prophetic message that will survive Jeremiah's crisis and have lasting significance for the community of faith.

An important spatial designation appears in the first lines of the book, and it will be source of several layers of irony. Jeremiah is from the village of Anathoth: located just north of Jerusalem, this town carries with it a certain freight of meaning in Judean tradition. The larger story of Anathoth actually begins at the end of 1 Samuel 2, when a prophetic word is spoken by an

itinerant man of God against the house of Eli. At the climax of that sweeping oracle, the man of God announces that Eli's line is about to be replaced, and any descendants will therefore be subservient: "I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed one forever. Everyone who is left in your family shall come to implore him for a piece of silver or a loaf of bread, and shall say, 'Please put me in one of the priest's places, that I may eat a morsel of bread'" (1 Sam 2:35–36).³ It has long been recognized that built into the Deuteronomistic History is a prophecy/fulfillment schema: in these texts, if a prophetic word is spoken, it will somehow find its fulfillment, notwithstanding a host of narrative vicissitudes.⁴ The prophetic word of 1 Samuel 2 finds its fulfillment in 1 Kings 2:27, as Abiathar is banished by Solomon to Anathoth. Solomon's motives for the banishment are political—Abiathar backed his older brother Adonijah to be the next king after David—but the divine will based on the antecedent prophetic word is also a factor. The name Abiathar, as it turns out, means something like "remnant of my father," a rather haunting name in light of the banishment and the line of Eli's termination from sanctuary service.

While it cannot be proven that Jeremiah's father Hilkiah is a descendent of Eli, there is enough scholarly support to mount a reasonable case. Jack Lundbom states that "Hilkiah could well be a descendant of Abiathar," while Terence Fretheim likewise stresses his priestly descent from the Elides ("he is a descendant of the tribe of Levi through the priest Abiathar").⁵ It is here that the ironic momentum of Jeremiah 1 begins to accelerate. Jeremiah is associated

3 Elsewhere I have noted the anagram on the rare verb translated *attach*: "The humiliation of Eli's house is made complete through an anagram in the final line of the oracle. The NRSV renders the last words of the scion of Eli's house as 'Please put me in one of the priest's places, that I may eat a morsel of bread' (1 Sam 2:36). But as J. P. Fokkelman (*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel. Vol. 4, Vow and Desire, 1 Sam. 1–12* [Assen: Van Gorcum, 1993] 151) observes, the verb 'put me' (סִפְּחֹתִי) forms an anagram with the names Hophni (חֹפְנִי) and Phinehas (פִּינְחָס). As one recalls, the Deuteronomist uses the anagram of judgment elsewhere, as 'Achan' (עֶכָּר) and 'Canaan' (כְּנָעַן) in Joshua 7 (see L. Daniel Hawk, *Joshua* [Berit Olam; Collegeville: Michael Glazier, 2000] 120). Thus, in "1 Sam 2:36, the irony lies in the fact that Hophni and Phinehas are not accorded any direct speech in their narrative. Yet their hungry descendent is left begging for bread by using an anagram of their name" (Keith Bodner, *1 Samuel: A Narrative Commentary*, HBM 19 [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2008], 35).

4 See Helga Weippert, "Histories and 'History': Promise and Fulfillment in the Deuteronomistic Historical Work," in *Reconsidering Israel and Judah: Recent Studies on the Deuteronomistic History*, ed. Gary N. Knoppers and J. Gordon McConville (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), 47–61.

5 Jack R. Lundbom, "Jeremiah," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:706–721; Terence E. Fretheim, *Jeremiah*, SHBC (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), 12–13.

with a priestly village that is a part of Israel's theological tradition, but from this introduction one gets the sense that he is an outsider as well: someone whose family knows what it means to be on the wrong side of a prophetic utterance; someone personally acquainted with the demands of covenant loyalty and who is still paying for the disobedience of ancestors. In other words, Jeremiah's family has experienced a measure of exile, and thus he is an ironic candidate to mediate words of impending exile to a nation that will shortly experience God's judgment that leads to exile. Consequently, this introduction serves to endow this prophetic book with a sense of forewarning: just as there had been judgment on the house of Eli, the same result is anticipated in Jeremiah's context, if the community does not repent. While much of the action in the book of Jeremiah is located in the royal capital of Jerusalem, this opening reference to another city, Anathoth, reminds the reader of earlier divine judgment and forecasts the looming catastrophe.

Given the association of the house of Eli with the city of Shiloh, it is notable that the former national sanctuary is a central illustration in Jeremiah's Temple sermon of chapter 7. Presumably Shiloh is destroyed in the battle of Ebenezer, and thus it abruptly ceases to be a central locale and place of worship (cf. Ps 78:60–64). Some four centuries later, in Jeremiah's time, Shiloh is evidently a heap of ruins, and the citizens of Judah are invited to compare the fate of Shiloh and the future of Jerusalem: "Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your sight? You know, I too am watching, says the LORD. Go now to my place that was in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel" (7:11–12; cf. 26:6–9). The cultic aberrations of the Elides are notorious: they devise an innovative three-pronged fork to increase their share of the boiled offerings, alongside their reprehensible abuse of the women serving at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (1 Sam 2:13; 22). Comparing Jerusalem to Shiloh, then, is a daring move. But the irony of Jeremiah's voice being the instrument of chastisement is what is most striking for our purposes, as this prophet from the doomed house of Eli—ousted for its corruption—is called to "call out" the corruption of the people. He whose descendants are on the wrong end of a prophet denunciation that resulted in the destruction of Shiloh is now deployed to call out the corruption that will result in the destruction of Jerusalem. That such an oracle is proclaimed in the temple is equally significant. Solomon is responsible for the temple's grandeur, but he is also the inaugural contributor to its corruption (and the one who exiles Abiathar from the capital), and such conduct receives its own rebuke sometime later: "Brueggemann remarks that when Solomon banishes Abiathar to Anathoth, whence will come Jeremiah some centuries later, 'Solomon has left alive the

most abrasive voices of critique of the monarchy, an abrasion that comes to full voice in the tradition of Jeremiah.”⁶ John Goldingay similarly concludes, “With irony, then, from the place to which Solomon banished Abiathar comes a man who will speak the word against Solomon’s edifice.” The Temple sermon of Jeremiah, then, glances back much further than is often supposed, casting a far-reaching net of indictment with multiple lines of accountability.

The call of Jeremiah is an integral component within the larger message and tapestry of the book. For someone with affiliations to a doomed line from a city that had been destroyed by divine judgment because of its iniquity, there is a remarkable extension of divine grace. Indeed, the LORD’s selection of Jeremiah as a prophetic voice becomes a larger comment on and picture of the kind of grace extended to the people of God after their season of chastisement. The redemptive theme that begins to emerge can be traced in a number of ways as the city of Jerusalem will be destroyed as was Shiloh (but rebuilt in due course), the Davidic line will be humbled as was the line of Eli for their transgressions and leadership failures (but not annulled), the temple will be demolished as was the sanctuary of Shiloh (but a place for offerings and sacrifices will emerge from the ashes), and the people will be exiled like Abiathar (but with prospects of a return and restoration). As one example, consider the scenes in Jeremiah 32–33 just prior to the piercing of the city wall. Chapter 32 is temporally located in the tenth year of Judah’s final king, Zedekiah; since chapter 33 opens while Jeremiah was still confined in the court of the guard, it would seem to be set in the same time period. Since Zedekiah reigns eleven years, the events of chapters 32–33 are thus situated very close to the end of the royal line, with the Babylonian army at the gates of Jerusalem as forecast in chapter 1. A more perilous situation for the prophet could hardly be imagined, as he is imprisoned within the city that itself is under assault. Yet the main event of chapter 32 is a real estate transaction offered by Jeremiah’s cousin with an offer to purchase some land in Anathoth. Most investment bankers would surely have advised against such a deal, but Jeremiah (under God’s orders) proceeds to buy the land that in all probability was occupied by Babylonian infantry at that very moment. Against all logic Jeremiah buys the land and publicly states the purpose behind his investment: “For thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land” (32:15). Moreover, in chapter 33—again in the context of confinement—there is an oracle about a sequence of restoration in terms of Davidic line, priestly offices, and apparently therefore a rebuilt temple: “For thus says the LORD:

6 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 245, citing Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 62.

David will never lack a successor to sit on the throne of the house of Israel, and the Levitical priests shall never lack a successor before me to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings, and to continually make sacrifices" (33:17–18). These astonishing promises of restoration after chastisement—of the land, the people, place of worship, and dynastic line—form the core of a redemptive subplot articulated through a voice intimately acquainted with prior divine judgment.

The confinement of Jeremiah in chapters 32–33 take place later in his career, bringing to mind his call narrative in chapter 1. Despite the foreboding ambience created by the mention of Anathoth and the evocations of the disaster that had been visited upon Eli's house, there is a rich narrative artistry at work as prophet's call unfolds, with a shift in tone through a personal voice: the word of God comes to him with a commission that was established *before* he was even crafted in the womb. The same verb "crafting" is used in Genesis 2 for the creation of the first human. Furthermore, this verb that I have rendered "craft" (יצר) is most commonly used for a potter sculpting clay. This is a key action in Jeremiah 18, where the poet goes down to "the potter's (היוצר) house" for a dramatic illustration of how God intends to deal with the people of Judah. It is singular, therefore, that such an earthy and memorable image commences the divine word. In the midst of such political chaos and upheaval that will mark this period in Judah's history, the prophet's calling begins with divine intimacy, and such intimacy will be a hallmark throughout his life. In chapter 1, the fledgling prophet is also told not to say, "I am a youth" (נער), and not to protest that he does not know how to speak. Such complaints from Jeremiah are ironically undermined in the very next chapter, as his poetic gifts are evident in his opening oracles that are replete with figurative language that draws from the natural world. In chapter 2 the recalcitrant people are variously compared with a "fleet-footed dromedary" frantically scurrying, a "wild donkey" enslaved by every wind of desire, and a pure vine that has defiled itself by crossbreeding with deficient stalk. Again, despite the protest about his youthfulness, it seems poetically appropriate that this opening oracle begins with a reflection about the nation's youth ("I remember the faithful devotion of your youth [נעוריד]), unleashing a series of images in chapter 2 oriented toward relationship: bride, betrothed maiden, fathers, lovers, spouse, and children.

Returning to Jeremiah's confinement narrated in chapters 32–33: this imprisonment likewise underscores the divine words in Jeremiah 1 about the citizens of Judah—ranging from the kings in Jerusalem, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land—all fighting against the prophet. Such strife is ubiquitous in his career; a memorable example occurs in chapter 20 with a violent confrontation between Jeremiah and a leader of the Jerusalem

establishment. Upon hearing the words of Jeremiah's prophetic utterance, Pashhur's response is to have the prophet beaten and incarcerated in the stocks. Jeremiah responds to Pashhur (one of the temple officers, probably the chief of the security force) with a mocking name change for the officer and a forceful declaration of impending exile, significant for many reasons including the fact that this is the first time that Babylon is explicitly mentioned in the scroll of Jeremiah.⁷ A related confrontation takes place with the (false) prophet Hananiah in chapter 28. Hananiah promotes the ideological position that Babylonian dominance would be short-lived, a sentiment that Jeremiah is unable to countenance: "Thus says the LORD: Do not listen to the words of your prophets who are prophesying to you, saying, 'The vessels of the LORD's house will soon be brought back from Babylon,' for they are prophesying deception (שקר) to you. Do not listen to them: serve the king of Babylon and live. Why should this city become a desolation?" (27:16–17). The enthusiasm of the contrary position (that the Babylonian threat is temporary) is no doubt enhanced because of the personalities involved, and evidently figures such as Hananiah are given a considerable amount of public acclaim. The "yoke" of Babylonian oppression is the central prop in the confrontation, and the yoke around the neck Jeremiah is a theatrical illustration. Hananiah's indignation is manifested when he triumphantly breaks the yoke in full view of all who are gathered, but his story does not end well, nor will it end well for Zedekiah and the city of Jerusalem.

The aggressive actions of Hananiah and Pashhur are typical of the kind of opposition the prophet faces throughout, and we could quite easily add the public humiliation the prophet endures at the hands of Irijah when Jeremiah is leaving the city to transact business (37:11–14), or the conspiracy launched by the people of Anathoth themselves against one of their own in order to silence him (11:18–20). So, when God discloses in chapter 1 that the prophet will experience hostility, this is borne out by ample evidence in the book. Despite the frequency of opposition, however, not one faction or individual is able finally to neutralize the prophet, reminding us of another divine guarantee in the opening chapter: God confirms that they will fight against Jeremiah, but not succeed "because I am with you, and will rescue you." One such rescue is found at the midway point of the book: set early in the reign of Jehoiakim, the events of chapter 26 outline a number of conflicts faced by the prophet. The first half of the chapter features a reprise of the temple sermon from chapter 7, with the city of Shiloh becoming a point of considerable dispute, and a

7 See John Hill, *Friend or Foe? The Figure of Babylon in the Book of Jeremiah* MT, BIS 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

sizeable crowd of onlookers becoming infuriated with Jeremiah and crying out for his death. Despite this call for the death penalty in the second half of the chapter, his life is spared on account of a peculiar intervention: some of the elders step forward and cite a precedent from none other than the prophet Micah, who in earlier days had prophesied in a not dissimilar tenor: "Zion will be plowed as a field, Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height" (Mic 3:12). This most surprising turn of events, as a group of supporters rise up in defense of Jeremiah by quoting an antecedent prophet. One of the allies is a member of the Shaphanite family: "But the hand of Ahikam son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah so that he was not given over into the hands of the people to be put to death" (26:24). Ahikam's father Shaphan had been involved in finding the lost book of the law in 2 Kings 22, and Gedaliah son of Shaphan is appointed over the land by the Babylonians in the wake of their victory, so this family provides several important allies of Jeremiah at critical moments in the story.

Another example of rescue comes through a remarkable set of events in chapter 38 when Jeremiah's straits become dire indeed: he is cast into an empty cistern where survival would be next to impossible. Indeed, even though Zedekiah seems privately favorable toward the prophet, he cowers before his advisors and consents to the virtual execution of the prophet (Jer 38:5–7). While Jeremiah's prospects seem hopeless, a new character emerges with an act of resourceful courage: Ebed-melech the Ethiopian eunuch. This outsider takes a calculated risk to intercede with the king and spearhead the rescue operation, taking thirty men and lifting the prophet out of the cistern. The kind treatment by a foreigner anticipates the prophet's treatment by the Babylonians. Even though Babylonian royalty is ensconced at the gates of the city, the prophet is treated favorably and given a choice by the military commander to remain in the land or be cared for in Babylon (40:1–5). His own people may fight against him, but the "kingdoms of the north"—so ominously introduced in the opening chapter—are much more respectful to the one who was appointed as a prophet to the nations.

Arguably the most mysterious rescue of Jeremiah occurs during the troublesome reign of Jehoiakim, in an account where a surprising "character" is a *scroll*: the episode in chapter 36 commences with the prophet to write a scroll of warning for the present inhabitants of Jerusalem that might lead to repentance and avoidance of disaster (36:2–3). But when the scroll is delivered to Jehoiakim—another member of the family of Shaphan is involved in transporting the scroll—the royal posture and reaction are fraught with malevolent disregard, as Jehoiakim cuts off the columns of the scroll and throws them into the fire burning in the brazier in front of him (36:22–24). Besides the fact

that he shows no fear, the king also dispatches agents to arrest the prophet, and at this moment the mysterious rescue is unveiled in verse 26 as the agents are foiled, for the LORD had hidden (סתר) them. The prophetic word is not so easily destroyed, for God instructs Jeremiah to replace the burned document with another one, and we read how the episode concludes in 36:32: "Then Jeremiah took another scroll and gave it to the secretary Baruch son of Neriah, who wrote on it at Jeremiah's dictation all the words of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned in the fire; and many similar words were added to them"—and it would seem the new version of the scroll is more fulsome than the first.

The mysterious divine hiding needs to be considered when reflecting on Jeremiah's last appearances in the book. Opting to remain in Judah after the invasion, the fractured community left behind sees their tenuous hopes gradually unravel: first with the murder of Gedaliah son of Shaphan, then with the decision of Johanan to flee to Egypt to escape Babylonian reprisals. Johanan leads a delegation to Jeremiah with a request to seek divine guidance, and after a sustained dialogue, provides an assurance that they will listen and submit to the divine word. As it turns out, Jeremiah's word is to stay in the land rather than seek the refuge of Egypt (so, remain in the promised land and receive the necessary discipline rather than grasping for safety and an apparent peace offered in another place). It must be perceived as a shocking development when, after all the assurances that they would listen, Johanan and company (labeled as arrogant or insolent, זר) refuse to accept the prophetic word and instead accuse Jeremiah of deception (שקר). The capstone irony has to be the march of folly that unfolds in chapter 43: throughout his career Jeremiah has been proclaiming the word of the LORD who brought Israel up out of Egyptian captivity, yet now the prophet is taken as a captive by his own people into the very land of Egypt whence they had been rescued those many centuries earlier. The reader might wonder if Jeremiah is, therefore, actually rescued in the end, but in his final scenes in chapter 44, he continues to declare the divine word, seemingly undaunted and with considerable energy since the oracle of chapter 44 is one of his longest sustained speeches.

These various examples, it is hoped, should be sufficient to make a case that the opening chapter of the book of Jeremiah operates as ironic overture, preparing the reader for numerous reversals, subversions, and surprising experiences that unfold in this long prophetic book. When reviewing the opening chapter, the reader discovers that Jeremiah's affiliation with Anathoth sets in motion a plethora of ironic situations. Not least, here is a figure—associated with a doomed line from a destroyed city—called to be a prophetic voice of judgment against a royal line and a capital city on verge of catastrophe for

similar kinds of offenses as the earlier house of Eli in Shiloh. But Jeremiah is also used as a voice that forecasts hope to the Davidic dynasty and the repatriated Jerusalem, and so just as Jeremiah from Anathoth gives fresh hope to those who had been humbled in years gone by, so he embodies hope for the people of God in the aftermath of exile and the trauma of dislocation. When considering this book in its canonical framework, the reader is better positioned to appreciate the contribution of Jeremiah to the Bible as a whole, and a metanarrative that often features God's choice of unlikely and unexpected instruments to send messages of grace to a broken world.

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Irony in Ezekiel's Book

Stephen L. Cook

The severe style of Ezekiel is not often humorous, but it does revel in perceiving and constructing irony. Irony is prevalent in the book, since the prophet's perceived reality is so often other than, or beyond, the world that others take for granted. His prophecies probe behind or beyond observable things and events, using metaphors and mythic poetry to reveal supernatural realities and underlying structures of existence. His language thus almost necessarily complicates meaning beyond the plain sense, beyond even what can be articulated in a rationalist, positivistic style. By their very nature, his revelations dissociate his audiences from common sense and their core assumptions and push people to reckon with new, incongruous contexts. These prophetic moves generate ironic prophetic literature.

In what follows, I explore Ezekiel's use of irony through close inspection of four sample texts: Ezekiel 24:1–14, the “Song of the Pot”; 8:1–18, a vision of abominations in the temple; 20:18–26, God's “no-good laws”; and 27:1–36, the “Good Ship Tyre.” I have chosen these four texts out of numerous possibilities in Ezekiel both because of their striking ironic content and because they exhibit the variety of irony in the scroll.

The first passage treated, 24:1–14, showcases Ezekiel's rhetorical skill in ironically twisting his audience's own metaphor to force an “awakening” to God's imminent judgment. The brilliant artistry of the second passage, 8:1–18, does not so much trick and surprise the audience as it unveils their worship practices as deeply disturbing aberrations, which produce results opposite to the worshipers' understandings. The third text in 20:18–26 reveals a dissembling God issuing a claim that can hardly be true in its plain sense. In an ethically questionable move, the LORD uses prevarication to push readers to a new theological perspective on the future of the covenant. The fourth and last passage in 27:1–36 presents Ezekiel's typical use of irony in prophetic judgments against foreign nations. He perceives outrageous irony in the colossal hubris that possesses a nation such as Tyre.

1 Ezekiel 24:1–14

On the day that the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem began, January 15, 588/587 BCE, God ordered Ezekiel to take on those among his compatriots still clinging to a theology of Jerusalem's inviolability. His ironic text in chapter 24 wages the dispute and in the process summarizes and concludes the first phase of his prophetic career, which announced God's irrevocable judgment on "the bloody city" (vv. 6, 9), stained with the blood of murders (v. 7). He completes his attempts to disabuse everyone in his orbit of influence of their unyielding blindness to Jerusalem's imminent end.

Ezekiel presents his initial refutation of the people's confidence in Zion in verses 3b–5, using a mock folksong—a traditional ditty accompanying domestic labor. Block describes it as "a popular work song (*Arbeitslied*) ... analogous to 'Polly Put the Kettle On.'"¹ At first there is no indication of any parabolic intent. In particular, there is no initial mention of the then-current "metaphor of the pot" in 11:3, 7, 11. Such a citation would fit the genre of *disputation*, which normally begins by quoting a saying in circulation. The popular saying *could* have fallen out of the text, but I maintain that Ezekiel purposely, as an ironic ploy, omits it. He conceals his point of reference in the saying of 11:3, which voices the attitude he disputes.²

By verse 6 of chapter 24, however, readers are clued in that the "pot" in the work-song is Jerusalem, just as in 11:3. Now there arises to mind the popular parable, "This city is the pot, and we are the meat." The term סִיר ("pot") occurs in Ezekiel only here in chapter 24 (vv. 3, 6) and back in chapter 11 (three times). The expansive rendering of the NLT clarifies the sense, "This city is like an iron pot. We are safe inside it like meat." In Greenberg's paraphrase: "We are the valuable content for which the pot exists and which the pot protects."³ Here is a metaphor of complacent presumption. As Jon Levenson puts it, one cannot find shelter in God's promises to Zion (Pss 2:4–6; 46:5; 125:1–2; 132:13–18) while also refusing to participate in the sacral, moral dynamic animating the

1 Daniel I. Block, *The Book of Ezekiel: Chapters 1–24*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 770.

2 Robert Alter writes: "The not saying of something (or the pretending not to say it) is an ancient rhetorical device ... Often enough the reticence is intended to increase the impact of what it purports to conceal" ("Anteriority, Authority, and Secrecy: A General Comment," *Semeia* 43 [1988]: 155–167, here 155–156; quoted in Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009], 1).

3 Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37*, AB 22A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 504.

temple.⁴ As God clarifies in verse 13, he wanted to regenerate the people, but they would not cooperate.⁵

Because of the people's intransigent complacency, Ezekiel's skillful rhetoric sets up a devastating parable of irony to shock them out of their dogmatic slumber.⁶ What hearers first believed was simple, happy dining—a fellowship offering in Zion's courts—turns out to be a deathly last meal! The arrogant of Judah have been correct, Jerusalem is a “pot,” and they its “meat.” Where they have been wrong is in their unsuspecting, naïve assumption that mere residence in Zion affords them unrestricted moral license. The irony is this: claiming to be metaphorical “meat” they find themselves in a “pot” of hot water—water boiling above intensely searing flames, a Babylonian siege!

Clues to Ezekiel's intent to create irony appear even before verse 6. The first colon of the parable uses the verbal form שפת (“set” the pot on the fire) that sounds just like שפט (“judge” the pot). The noun מבוחר (“choicest”) appears twice (vv. 4, 5), and conjures the thought of the people's arrogance about their election (בחר, Ezek 20:5). By verse 5 the song specifies that a choice animal is being butchered, “the choicest of the flock,” presumably for a fellowship-offering meal in the temple courts. Resonances with the familiar metaphor of Israel itself as a holy flock will echo in some ears (see Ezek 34:1–16; 36:37–38; 1 Kgs 1:17; Pss 23:1–4; 74:1; 79:13; 95:7; 100:3).

By the end of the song, irony begins to spark as a possible new, incongruous meaning emerges. Ezekiel's audience itself is the meal being cooked! God's protection of the holy flock is actually not indiscriminate. Nebuchadnezzar

4 Jon D. Levenson, *Sinai and Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1985), 335–338. Levenson explains that in the ideal of Zion theology, the temple “represents the fixity and permanence of cosmic reality. As it comes into contact with the human will, protean and volatile, it exerts a profound moral dynamic. Zion is a catalyst for moral improvement.” Because he finds that it has been so misused and twisted in Israel's covenant history with God, Ezekiel never advocates for Zion theology proper in his prophecies. For discussion of Zion theology in Ezekiel, see Thomas Renz, “The Use of the Zion Tradition in the Book of Ezekiel,” in *Zion, City of Our God*, ed. Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 77–103; Daniel I. Block, “Transformation of Royal Ideology in Ezekiel,” in *Transforming Visions: Transformations of Text, Tradition, and Theology in Ezekiel*, ed. William A. Tooman and Michael A. Lyons (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 208–246; idem, “Zion Theology in the Book of Ezekiel,” in *Beyond the River Chebar: Studies in Kingship and Eschatology in the Book of Ezekiel* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 1–9; Stephen L. Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48, AB 22B* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 125, 184, 288, 296.

5 Verses 7–8 give a glaring example of the people's continuing unregenerate state. Heedless of God's judgment, the city's officials have not even bothered to cover up the blood of their innocent victims.

6 Dogmatic slumber is “that easy and comfortable state of resting on one's unexamined assumptions.” See H. Albertus Boli's comments at <http://bit.ly/dogmatics slumber>.

has “laid” siege to Jerusalem (סַמַּךְ, 24:2), just as one “lays” one’s hand (סַמַּךְ) on the head of a sacrificial animal in Zion’s courts (Lev 1:4; 3:2, 8, 13; 4:24).⁷ The siege will turn the city into a fiery temple stovetop boiling a lamb.

As verse 6 begins, a messenger formula introduces the interpretation (the tenor) of the pot metaphor (the rhetorical vehicle). As in Ezekiel 11, the trusted “pot” of Zion cannot protect the Jerusalemites. As God had earlier declared, “This city shall not be your pot [of safety]” (11:11). The prophet’s interpretation of the mock folksong could have stopped at this point, but unsurprisingly, given his proclivity for baroque elaboration of tropes, Ezekiel intensifies the irony. The Jerusalemites have mistaken prime cuts of meat for what is unhealthy “filth” (24:6, 11–13). As Iain Duguid puts it, “What ought to be a tasty sacred meal is, in fact, a foul ... mess.”⁸

In verses 9–14 a new strophe offers a second stab at interpreting and expanding the parable of the pot. God plans to pick up where the cook of verses 3–5 left off. God will stoke the flames, “so the germs are killed, and the corruption is burned” (so the Message Bible). Only by piling wood on the flames can the cooking be finished, the broth be evaporated, and the pot be superheated to cleanse it of its “gunk” (חֲלָאָה), its “impurity” (טִמְאָה, v. 11). Exasperated, God declares, “It has frustrated all effort, its thick scum will not leave it—into the fire with its scum!” (v. 12, NJPS).

The term *gunk* appears five times in Ezekiel 24, so Ezekiel is likely using the rare term, found nowhere else in scripture, to push his audience to contemplate the nature of Jerusalem’s putrescence. Contrary to the translation “rust” (NRSV, NJB, and NASB), Greenberg is correct that Ezekiel is concerned with what is *inside* Zion, contaminating it, not with any defect in Zion itself.⁹ In

7 The sacrificial use of the term occurs in priestly texts of the Pentateuch quite familiar to a Zadokite priest such as Ezekiel. Iain M. Duguid writes, “By Ezekiel’s use of this terminology, Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as designating Jerusalem as the sacrificial lamb—though hardly one without spot or blemish” (*Ezekiel*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999], 313).

8 Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 314. Sharp (*Irony and Meaning*, 129) correctly highlights Ezekiel’s established reputation for using irony brutally to destroy his audience’s “conception of itself as chosen and pure.” The translation “rust” (NRSV) for *ḥel’ā* is technically impossible since a pot of copper or bronze (v. 11) cannot rust. Some translations think of *corrosion* (CEB, NEB, REB), but the term probably refers not to the pot itself but to its content, which is *filth* (see Targum, NABR) or *gunk*. Block (*Ezekiel 1–24*, 777) explains *ḥel’ā* as an Aramaized variant of **ḥālā*, from the root *ḥlh*, “be unhealthy, unwholesome,” with *aleph* replacing *hē*. It is internally parallel with *ṭum’ā*, “filth,” in the final colon of v. 11 (cf. *ṭum’ā* in v. 13; 2 Chr 19:16). Since it is difficult to cleanse the pot of it (v. 12), the vessel has likely become “encrusted” (NIV).

9 Moshe Greenberg writes, “*ḥel’ā* is a defiling substance inside the pot—the copper pot (vs. 11)—that will yield only to overheating” (*Ezekiel 1–20*, AB 22 [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983], 499). Also see Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 778.

Ezekiel 22, another judgment of Jerusalem, the prophet repeatedly confronts the city with the defilement that is “in you” (viz., inside Zion, 2 fs; 22:9, 10, 11, 12, 13). In 22:15 God determines to purge the *impurity* (טמאה) “out of you” (ממך, 2 fs suffix). Just so, verse 11 of chapter 24 pairs טמאה (“impurity”) with חלאה, the “rot” or “gunk” in Jerusalem the “pot” (24:13 also has טמאה).

I have elsewhere used the rubric “murk” as a label for what Ezekiel and his priestly forebears viewed as a negative counterpart to holiness. *Murk* is an infectious ethical and ceremonial gunk termed טמאה in Leviticus 16:16, 19; Ezekiel 22:15; 36:17, 25, 29; 39:24. Uncanny in character, it can build up in society like a caked-on mess, an “encrusted residue of cooked matter stuck to the inside of [a] pot that fouls it disgustingly.”¹⁰

For Ezekiel, the front opposing holiness cannot be domesticated ... It can attach itself to specific physical objects—Ezekiel’s temple altar in particular attracts it ... Like a preternatural ether, it leaks out of corpses to infect people (Ezek 44:25–27; Num 19:11 HS). It even enters containers not covered with lids (see the treatment of corpse contagion in Num. 19:15).¹¹

That murk’s contagion has transformed Jerusalem’s inhabitants into a stubbornly caking crust of defilement gives rise to a final irony in our passage. Zion’s citizens expect that they will freely and safely come out of the city, the “pot,” once the Babylonian siege fails. If, however, they are not the choice meat they imagine, but are the baked-on murk of Ezekiel’s prophecy, coming out of the pot intact is not in the cards.

2 Ezekiel 8:1–18

If Edwin Good’s statement is true that “irony is criticism, implicit or explicit, which perceives in things as they are an incongruity,” then Ezekiel’s visionary tour of temple abominations in Ezekiel 8:1–18 is thoroughly ironic.¹² Translated from Babylonian exile back to Jerusalem, the prophet witnesses four scenes of detestable ritual within the sacred precincts that are outrageously incongruous with everything Ezekiel ever understood the temple to represent. The loathsome worship in question would be outrageous anywhere in Israel, but its performance right within Judah’s central sacral compound has even God

¹⁰ Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 499.

¹¹ Cook, *Ezekiel 38–48*, 23.

¹² Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Almond, 1981), 30–31.

dumbfounded. “Are you seeing this?” God asks Ezekiel four times (8:6, 12, 15, 17).¹³ As in 47:6, the diction is that of sheer amazement.

As the vision of the river of life flowing from the temple in Ezekiel 47:1–12 shows, ideally God’s temple should gush forth life to irrigate and fructify the land (as in Joel 3:18; Zech 13:1; 14:8; cf. Pss 36:8–9; 46:4). A river of Eden (Gen 2:10–14) should flow out to transform Israel’s entire land into a lush temple courtyard.¹⁴ Here in Ezekiel 8, in contrast, outrageous obscenities are driving the LORD, who is “Israel’s fountain” (Ps 68:26), “far from [God’s] sanctuary” (Ezek 8:6; 9:3). Ironically, the shrine then becomes ground zero for death (Ezek 9:6), not life. As Hals writes, “Irony ... appears in the way the shrine where life was imparted has become the starting point for death, the way the place of sanctuary within whose bounds the endangered could find refuge [is] now ... judged to be a place of abominations and destined for defilement with corpses [Ezek 9:7].”¹⁵

The funerary mourning for the god Tammuz/Dumuzi in Ezekiel 8:14–15 (scene 3) brings the pollution of death into the temple well before the corpses of 9:7 amass in its courts. Whatever the exact form of the ancient (originally Mesopotamian) rite practiced here, it contaminated the temple with the taint of death. The ritual wailing and shedding of tears directly exposed the sacred precincts to deathly decay (murk). The acts made contact with Dumuzi in his annual captivity in the underworld. In Ezekiel’s theology, any such contact pollutes and defiles and risks transmitting a contagious impurity antithetical to the sacredness of the temple (Lev 10:6–11; 21:1–6; Num 19:13; Ezek 43:7–9; 44:20, 25).¹⁶

Before seeing the Dumuzi rites, God orders Ezekiel in 8:7–13 (scene 2) to “dig” into an infernal sacrarium in the temple. There, Judah’s elders, making the shadow of death their companion, offer incense to “loathsome animals.” As Job would say, they make “friends with the terrors of deep darkness” (Job 24:16–17). In both Job 24:16 and Amos 9:2 the rare verb חָתַר (“dig,” Ezek 8:8) entails connecting to Sheol. In each text, the wicked hide in the deathly gloom. They think, “No eye will see me” (Job 24:15).

Blenkinsopp is likely correct to connect the images of loathsome creatures on the walls of the anti-sanctum (Ezek 8:10) with the paintings of divinities

13 The interrogative syntax has exclamatory nuance (see Cook, *Ezekiel* 38–48, 264; Block, *Ezekiel* 1–24, 286 n. 18).

14 See Cook, *Ezekiel* 38–48, 273.

15 Ronald M. Hals, *Ezekiel*, FOTL XIX (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 56.

16 See Cook, *Ezekiel* 38–48, 220–221.

on the walls of Egyptian burial chambers.¹⁷ Prominent among such tomb images was the jackal-headed Anubis, who could either warm the hearts of the dead or weigh and judge them harshly.¹⁸ Were the elders in this liturgical netherworld offering incense to Egyptian deities to enlist their support (see Ezek 17:15; Jer 37:5, 7, 11)? Were they warding off terrible demonic powers, identified with an imminent enemy assault? The latter suggestion is provocative, given that there is an ironic reversal of Numbers 16:41–50 (MT: 17:6–15) here in Ezekiel. The episode of liturgical censuring in Numbers 16 aimed to drive away a terrible plague.¹⁹

Numbers 16:41–50 is an episode within a story of rebellion in the wilderness authored by priests of the same theological stripe as Ezekiel.²⁰ In the episode, the congregation of Israel faces a massive punishment from God on a par with the threat facing Judah in Ezekiel's time. Like the elders in Ezekiel 8:11, Aaron engages the crisis by sending up incense from a censer. As Everett Fox translates Numbers 16:11, "Moshe said to Aharon: Take [your] pan and place upon it fire from the altar and put smoking-incense [there]; go quickly to the community and effect appeasement for them, for the fury is [still] going-out from the presence of YHWH—the plague has begun!" (Schocken Bible).

Ironically, the seventy elders of Ezekiel 8:11 manage to turn Aaron's successful rite of censuring completely on its head. As a priest, Aaron lights his incense at the public altar, a sacral point of interconnection with heaven. As laity, the elders offer clandestine incense, connecting with Sheol and death. Aaron's propitiatory use of authorized incense had protected the community and averted God's wrath. The elders' skulking use of strange incense brings abominations

17 Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Ezekiel*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 55. For sample images, see Charles K. Wilkinson and Marsha Hill, *Egyptian Wall Paintings: The Metropolitan Museum of Art's Collection of Facsimiles* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1983), 21, fig. 16; 136, figs. 23.2.84–86; 137, fig. 23.2.82; 138, fig. 30.4.1; 139, fig. 15.5.18; 153, fig. 15.5.10 (<https://bit.ly/3vLRJ6w>).

18 For a representative image, visit <http://bit.ly/Nakhtamun> (identical to Wilkinson and Hill, *Egyptian Wall Paintings*, 151, fig. 33.8.21).

19 As Block (*Ezekiel* 1–24, 293) puts it, "This interpretation finds support in several Egyptian pictorial reliefs that portray sieges of Levantine cities, in which men stand on top of the walls with arms stretched heavenward in prayer. At their head is a man holding a censer." See the figure on the far right atop the Ashkelon tower in Assaf Yasur-Landau, *The Philistines and Aegean Migration at the End of the Late Bronze Age* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 219, fig. 7.2.

20 The Zadokite account in Num 16:1–18:7 of the revolt of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram had a major impact on Ezekiel, especially on Ezek 44. See Cook, *Ezekiel* 38–48, 206–223. Nathan MacDonald explores Ezek 44's dependence on this part of Numbers, but he focuses mainly on Num 18 (*Priestly Rule: Polemic and Biblical Interpretation in Ezekiel 44*, BZAW 476 [Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015], 41–47).

inside God's temple, directly provoking divine wrath. Surely, Ezekiel intends this irony to shame his audience. Citing Glenn Holland, Sharp notes that for an audience to perceive its own ironizing is for it then to feel shame.²¹

Verse 12 provides the elders' rationalization for their outrageous deeds. The interrelated circumstances cited suggest Ezekiel is glimpsing a future time of crisis close to Babylon's breach of Jerusalem. Their confidence in Zion's invulnerability (e.g., the "pot," Ezek 11:3, 11, 15) finally dashed, the elders conclude that God has abandoned the city. Since God apparently no longer cares about them, they are left on their own to interact with whatever preternatural powers remain. How ironic! The LORD cared deeply about the temple and had not yet taken his leave, but now would do so thanks to these elders.

God was only too aware of the elders' rites, which outraged him enough to bring Ezekiel back from Babylonia to witness them. The elders are imbecilic to believe they have "cover" there in the dark. There is no cover from YHWH, not even by digging to Sheol (Amos 9:2; Ezek 31:15).²² As Sharp puts it: "Run from God, and one can run for many days and get nowhere at all."²³ Ironically, however, God will soon turn away! God will shut his ears to all the elders' pleas in 8:18. Here, in a final irony, the fate of the elder Jaazaniah (8:11) is fully dissociated from the meaning of his name, "YHWH listens."

I began this section with a reference to Edwin Good's position that irony is criticism of things as they stand. Ezekiel 8 fits this position well, ironizing the behavior of Judah's elders in order to demonstrate with what good cause judgment is on its way. The irony in Ezekiel's vision certainly, as Good puts it, "clarifies with extreme sharpness the incongruity involved in a matter of great moment."²⁴ The elders have so perfectly inverted the sacramental power of the temple as to trade its holiness for impurity, its taproot of life-force for a spigot of morbidity, its indwelling holy LORD for creeping and loathsome gods.

21 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 128, 132–133, quoting Glenn S. Holland, "Paul's Use of Irony as a Rhetorical Technique," in *The Rhetorical Analysis of Scripture: Essays from the 1995 London Conference*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Thomas E. Olbricht, JSOTSup 146 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 239. The effect of shame will be to provoke either (1) anger and incredulity or (2) a desire to return to normative standards (in Ezek 8:10–11, a return to the narrative paradigm set by Moses and Aaron in Num 16:41–50).

22 So too Jonah, the quintessentially ironic prophet, flees to the underworld for "cover" from God (see Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 180). He descends *down* to Joppa, *down* into a ship's hold (Jonah 1:3), and *down* to its lowest recesses (Jonah 1:5; Ezek 32:23 applies the same diction to the "farthest depths of the abyss," REB). Finally, Jonah's descent leads him literally *down* to Sheol in Jonah 2:6.

23 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 181 (of Jonah's ironic dive for cover).

24 Good, *Irony in the Old Testament*, 24 (quoted in Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 13).

As Sharp notes, Good understands the ironic vision of scripture to serve the interests of covenant. Ezekiel's particular covenant, the Holiness Code, prioritized God's כבוד ("Presence") indwelling Israel. The ironizing in chapter 8 decries the present collapse of that priority, warranting the impending advent of the standard treaty curses at the covenant's end.

3 Ezekiel 20:18–26

Ezekiel's sweeping theological periodization of Israel's history in chapter 20 contains much irony,²⁵ but the rhetoric in verses 18–26 stands out. These verses present the third of four eras into which the prophet's panoramic chronicle divides Israel's history with YHWH. In each era, God's people prove themselves fundamentally corrupt and rebellious. There is no improvement over time, for each generation proves a carbon copy of its predecessor.

Verses 25–26, of particular interest here, are the final lines of the chapter's third panel, the era of wilderness wanderings (20:18–26). Here, the people's mounting offenses culminate in the gripping irony that God's covenant laws, hitherto understood as gifting Israel with life (20:11, 13, 21), now prove to be deathly (v. 25). They effect child sacrifice. As they offer up their murdered children, God is defiling the people (v. 26).

God's granting "bad" laws is a hostile measure in response to Israel's rebellion, which is continuing even though God has spared the people annihilation for a third time. As horrific as it is to hear of the new generation making actual child sacrifices to YHWH, it is even more stunning to hear God taking responsibility for it. As Daniel Block puts it, "Interpreted at face value, these verses create horrifying and intolerable theological problems."²⁶ But these verses are not for "straight" reading. Rather, they are an ironic inversion of the people's unsuspecting assumption that they act with free moral agency.

Antithetic voices clash within Ezekiel 20. Verses 11, 13, and 21 leave no doubt that God's laws, the covenant stipulations, ideally *infuse* Israel with life. Now, in v. 25, an incongruous new voice begins a dialog. Verse 25 antithetically declares that the rebellious wilderness generation receives God's laws as death-dealing eye-openers rather than as a means to life. This counter-voice destabilizes common knowledge about how ancient covenants work. Everyone knows that vassal treaties allow a suzerain and vassals to forge the future bilaterally, each contributing productively to a shared history.

25 See, e.g., Mikel E. Satcher, *For the Sake of My Holy Name: The Divine Reputation in Ezekiel as a Literary Phenomenon* (Bloomington, IN: Exlibris, 2012), 48–49.

26 Block, *Ezekiel 1–24*, 637.

A parallel tension of voices arises in the next verse. Verse 26 points to the Pentateuchal first-born laws as chief among God's "bad" legal statutes,²⁷ problematizing the question of who is ultimately responsible for child sacrifice in Israel. Is Israel to blame or is God? Verse 31 makes Israel culpable, which is the natural, "innocent" view of how cosmic justice should work. The Holiness Code covenant specifies dire punishments for child sacrifice (Lev 18:21; 20:2). Ezekiel 20:26, in contrast, incongruously declares that God has manipulated the covenant to bring Israel kicking and screaming back to knowledge of YHWH (see v. 33). "I defiled them through their very gifts ... so that they might know that I am the LORD" (v. 26).²⁸

The ironic inversions in Ezekiel 20:25–26 are deeply unsettling. With these verses the prophet risks pinning himself as a cold fatalist about Israel's spiritual potential. Really, Ezekiel? God games the system of Israelite covenantal ethics? How offensive! Ezekiel here becomes a counter-cultural loner, fitting Kierkegaard's model of the brave ironist isolated by his scathing rejection of the obvious. Ezekiel is now "a mysterious hieroglyph for his contemporaries, among whom he lives as a stranger."²⁹

Verses 25–26 are "mysterious." They are a powerful work of irony. They are not, however, simply absurd. They do not nullify the general cogency of accepted ancient thinking about covenants.³⁰ Covenantal stipulations do have constructive benefits—if the parties to the agreement are rational, morally free agents. But therein lies the rub. Ezekiel 20:25–26 points beyond the idea of morally free parties to a treaty and perceives a tragic theological insight into Israel's desperate spiritual condition. Israel's sad history proves that it is morally enslaved. God's people have shown themselves time and again to be

27 The people were probably using the "law of the firstborn" (Exod 22:29; 34:19) to legitimate child sacrifice (see Ezek 16:20–22). God let them become defiled through God's very law (cf. Ezek 14:9). On God's good gifts provoking perversion, cf. Ezek 7:20; 16:14–15, 17–21; 28:14–15. For discussion, see George C. Heider, *The Cult of Molek: A Reassessment*, JSOTSup 43 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 320–321, 372; idem, "A Further Turn on Ezekiel's Baroque Twist in Ezek 20:25–26," *JBL* 107 (1988): 721–724; Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1, Hermeneia* (trans. R. E. Clements and James D. Martin; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 411.

28 A similar dynamic appeared in 24:7–8 as part of Ezekiel's interpretation of the Song of the Pot. In 24:7 Jerusalem heedlessly flaunts its guilt by leaving shed blood exposed, but in v. 8 God declares that he was at work in this glaring witness to the city's guilt. See Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1–20*, 500–501.

29 Søren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, With Constant Reference to Socrates* (trans. Lee M. Capel; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), 85.

30 Here, I agree with Jonathan A. Kruschwitz: "Irony is not a simple hierarchy of meaning ... It embraces not a single propositional meaning but the entire dialogic conflict" (*Interludes and Irony in the Ancestral Narrative* [Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2021], 69).

irredeemable apart from an irresistible exercise of divine sovereignty over their destiny.

Mark Antony's claim (in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*) that "Brutus is an honorable man" is famously ironic. It is a "rhetorically dissociative" evaluation of Brutus, which ends up damning him.³¹ Like Antony, God prevaricates in Ezekiel 20:25–26.³² God makes the historically dubious claim that he "gave [Israel] statutes that were not good."

In actual reality, YHWH's covenantal laws once did intend good, though some have proved "no-good" in practice. Still, a more complex truth needs to be explored to get a bigger, truer picture. In Ezekiel's ironic ploy, dialogic conflict points to a larger, more complex narrative. The picture entails a dread cessation of the normal dynamics of covenantal cooperation between God and Israel. Israel has strained the covenant beyond what it, and God, can bare. The time is past for finding life by obeying God's laws.³³ Now only God's sovereign determination to restore people and land can set things right.³⁴

The core irony of Ezekiel 20 is this. Whether the Israelites allow God's laws to bring them life or are so rebellious as to allow these laws to bring death, God will bring God's people back into relationship (20:37). As Duguid puts it, "God's salvation purposes are unshakeable."³⁵ One way or another, God's people will serve God, and will ironically find release from bondage in that service. A glimpse of radical freedom emerges here, a paradoxical freedom found in allowing God's sovereignty its prerogative.

Sharp aptly comments on how the irony of faith is finally its sense of freedom in God, a freedom that Kierkegaard well understood.³⁶ God's exercise of God's sovereign determination will now free Israel permanently from a perpetual cycle of disobeying the covenant and suffering retribution. Here is a new vision beyond the primacy of covenantal obedience. Ezekiel 20:39 again expresses the irony, "As for you, people of Israel, this is what the Sovereign LORD says: Go and serve your idols, every one of you! But afterward you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name" (NIV; cf. NJB).

31 For discussion, see Kruschwitz, *Interludes and Irony*, 68.

32 Sharp (*Irony and Meaning*, 13) notes that "irony is based on a kind of dissembling that some deem morally unacceptable as being equivalent to—or treading perilously close to—outright deception."

33 Ellen F. Davis aptly characterizes the "bad laws" as an "anti-gift" that renders the very notion of obedience inoperative (*Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy*, BLS 21 [Sheffield, England: Almond, 1989], 114–116).

34 Block (*Ezekiel 1–24*, 639–640) approvingly cites Davis's observation that Ezekiel consistently insists on YHWH's "indisputable authority to determine and interpret the course of human history."

35 Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 266.

36 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 14.

4 Ezekiel 27:1–36

The Dirge over Tyre in 27:1–36 prophesies a strongly tragic irony. Here, an elaborate metaphor of a magnificent Phoenician ship depicts the grandeur and momentous fall of Tyre as a massive shipwreck. Tyre appears as a gorgeous, titanic merchant vessel, whose crew would not have entertained the thought of sinking at sea. The accolades that Ezekiel lavishes upon the vessel bespeak the crew's assumption of only glorious voyages. So too, the hubris of the ship's backers, builders, and owners has blinded them all. Such is the universal esteem for Tyre that Ezekiel's paean of praise lasts for twenty-three verses (vv. 3b–25). In contrast, only three verses (vv. 26–28) report its wreck. Duguid captures the irony well: "Her beauty and security count for nothing when the storm strikes."³⁷

Ezekiel chose his ship metaphor aptly, for Tyre was the great maritime trading power of the time. Its trading circuit spanned the breadth of the Mediterranean, east to Mesopotamia, and south to Africa and Arabia. The Phoenicians were essential in creating a new sea-based economy, a mercantile economy based on transporting heavy metals by ship.³⁸ What is more, as an island fortress, the city, like a ship, was at home in the sea. In fact, according to one of its founding legends, the island of Tyre was originally not attached to the sea floor but rose and fell with the waves. It is thus a striking irony that the sea, which enriched and protected Tyre, here so quickly and utterly turns against it.

Ezekiel 27 represents a prophetic appropriation and elaboration of the ancient genre of funerary dirge. Many dirges contain several or all of the following elements and motifs: (1) an exclamation of shock at calamitous loss; (2) a summons to mourn; (3) a memory of past glory; (4) a presentation of present collapse and death that contrasts markedly with element 3; and (5) an expression of dreadful awe at the collapse.³⁹

37 Duguid, *Ezekiel*, 336.

38 The name Phoenician means literally "Purple People," reflecting their worldwide fame for trading in a luxurious purple dye. It is not incidental that Ezekiel's depiction of their metaphorical ship is drawn in vibrant color (27:7, 16, 24). See the fulsome treatment of Ezek 27 in Ellen F. Davis, *Biblical Prophecy: Perspectives for Christian Theology, Discipleship, and Ministry*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 119–126.

39 R. Mark Shipp, *Of Dead Kings and Dirges: Myth and Meaning in Isaiah 14:4b–21*, AcBib 11 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 50–51; Claus Westermann, *Lamentations: Issues and Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 1–2; Hedwig Jahnow, *Das hebräische Leichenlied im Rahmen der Völkerdichtung*, BZAW 36 (Giessen: Töpelmann, 1923). These elements and motifs relate especially to what Shipp classifies as "common" funerary dirges, as opposed to city laments and extra-Israelite "royal" dirges.

The building blocks of irony are surely recognizable here. The bewilderment at epic calamity (1) highlights ironic incongruities between expectations of sustained glory and a reality of horrific collapse. Sharp tensions between past majesty and present ruin (3–4) are grist for the mill of irony, which features clashing voices, perspectives, and narratives. So too, the genre's intimations of dread amid collapse (5) help develop irony, a literary trope that unnerves all confidences and often points to the ineffable. Irony often creates a sense that unknown or transcendent fates or fortunes are at play in history.

Twenty-first-century readers cannot avoid comparing the fate of the "Good Ship Tyre" to the infamous sinking of the R. M. S. Titanic in 1912. Acclaimed at the time as the largest and safest ship in the world, the vessel was deemed unsinkable. Impervious to the danger of icebergs, the ship's crew failed to take radio warning messages seriously, alter the vessel's course, or reduce its speed. It was simply unthinkable that such a monumental human achievement of shipbuilding could sink. Titans ruled the cosmos for eons, so a ship named *Titanic* should rule the waves. Even as the ship stopped dead in the water, stewards told inquisitive passengers that nothing was afoot.

Rather than delve deeper here into the skillful rhetoric of Ezekiel 27, I want to focus on an aspect of irony that we have already seen in 20:18–26, its ability to speak to realities unarticulated in the text, lying outside the text and sometimes outside of empirical observation. Already in 20:18–26 we have seen irony push beyond a tension between two discrete voices to a new theological vision that the text does not specifically articulate. This happens again in Ezekiel's dirge over Tyre, but with the added sophistication of a combined use of the tropes of metaphor and irony.

In 27:1–26 metaphor and irony conspire to thrust us outside what the text plainly states to learn the truth to which it strives to point. The dirge asks the reader to contemplate what is unspoken. Through expressions of dreadful awe at monumental collapse, the song of Tyre's downfall pushes the reader to imagine the involvement of forces of destiny, the will of the universe, or, better, a divinely ordained deep structure.

In verses 29–32, the many who hear of the Tyrian ship's ruin stand on the shore and gaze at the wreck. They throw dust on their heads and cry aloud, "Who on the high seas has ever seen a wreck like that of Tyre?" The text, however, does not stop at depicting ordinary funerary grief. It describes a response of dread. The CEB captures the impact of the numinous on all witnesses, who "shudder on account of you ... Their hair stands on end; their faces betray their horror" (v. 35). The onlookers perceive that there is an awful unsaid truth to which the sinking of Tyre points.

Just as irony points to the involvement of transcendence in Tyre's fate, Ezekiel's well-chosen metaphor of a merchant vessel joins in suggesting that

the nation's fate has been determined by an unspoken truth outside the text. Ezekiel does not employ metaphors merely as a category of language or as rhetorical ornamentation in his texts. He knows that metaphor not only may interpret reality but also may legitimately be described as impacting, transforming, and disfiguring it. A given metaphor may even represent a type of hypostasis, deep structure, or governing paradigm that drives human experience. After all, Ezekiel's metaphorical truth in chapter 27 is no mere imaginative elaboration of Tyre's individual experience but subsists in God's construction of reality (see Prov 16:18).

Don Collett has treated biblical metaphors that work this way: they present to readers the substance of a transcendent reality, making ontological claims and demands.⁴⁰ Collett asks, "Is it always the case that metaphors in poetic discourses or genres lack ontological status? Shall we think of all biblical metaphors as quasi-Kantian phenomena that fail to mediate any descriptive knowledge of that which lies beyond our temporal experience?"⁴¹

5 Conclusions

Ezekiel's book leans heavily on irony to do its prophetic work, as shown by this essay's survey of four representative passages. The book's irony is rarely humorous but usually either undermines the false confidence and optimism of God's people or pushes the reader to form more sophisticated, *theological* conceptions of reality. As in 20:18–26, the book's irony can aim at both goals.

Two of the four examples studied, the Song of the Pot and the Good Ship Tyre, combine metaphor and irony. Metaphor is mostly about the "construction of similarity" whereas irony is chiefly about the "construction of difference."⁴² Ezekiel moves masterfully through "similarity" to "difference." He knows his addressees will readily accept his "constructions of similarity"; they will see themselves in them. At the same time, he chooses metaphors conveying presumed majesty with hidden (but inherent) soft spots or chinks. These vulnerabilities he flips to his own advantage, to great ironic effect.

40 Don C. Collett, *Figural Reading and the Old Testament: Theology and Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020), 99.

41 Collett, *Figural Reading*, 97.

42 Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 59–66, cited in Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 20.

Proper irony, Carolyn Sharp observes, may entail more than just a clash of perceptions or perspectives with a single voice winning. It can push the reader out of the binary dialog to an "intersection" beyond it.⁴³ The artistry of Ezekiel 20 pushes dialectically to a properly ironic intersection, a new perspective beyond the confines of what the chapter states literally.⁴⁴ Without using any such terms, Ezekiel 20 pushes us to accept that God will have to exercise preventive grace to correct the world. Standard covenantal dynamics have failed, so holiness now wins out through the exercise of God's cosmic prerogative.

Metaphor and irony may work together to bear witness to a transcendent truth or reality making ontological claims on readers even apart from the text. Both metaphor and irony move beyond straight statements and simple descriptions to "relational and additive" language.⁴⁵ In other words, both metaphor and irony may push a reader out of the linguistic positivity of a given text to draw on extralinguistic sensibilities and intuitions.⁴⁶ In order to do its theological and spiritual work, Ezekiel 27's ironic metaphor of an ancient Titanic counts on resonating with readers' intuitive sense that all human experience must eventually align with the universe's providential structuring by God.

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43 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 22.

44 Again, Sharp (*Irony and Meaning*, 24) writes, "Irony invites the reader's complicity in the rejection of the surface meaning of the matter being communicated and invites participation in the creation of a new meaning that simultaneously relies on and moves beyond that which has been stated."

45 Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 59–66.

46 Joseph Stern, *Metaphor in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000), 13.

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Entertaining Contradictions: Continuing the Conversation on Irony in the Book of Jonah

L. Juliana Claassens

1 Introduction

Irony usually suggests the capacity or the need to entertain two contradictory positions simultaneously; there can, however, be no irony in a position which insists upon one exclusive claim to the truth.¹

It is ironic that many readings that highlight irony in the book of Jonah argue ardently for a particular, incontrovertible truth, so overlooking the fact that one of the central characteristics of irony is, as Arnold Band reminds us above, to hold two incongruous positions together.² Yvonne Sherwood has shown how ironic readings of Jonah tend to paint the prophet Jonah as “the sole target of satire” (and I would argue also of its cousins, parody and comedy), as irony is used to criticize and even ridicule the anti-hero of this enigmatic narrative.³ In quite a few of these readings, Jonah is portrayed as “self-centered,” “narrow-minded,” “disobedient,” “petty,” and “mulish”—a foolish and prejudiced prophet who simply does not understand that God is a loving deity whose mercy extends to all, even Judah’s worst enemies.⁴ In such interpretations,

1 Arnold J. Band, “Swallowing Jonah: The Eclipse of Parody,” *Prooftexts* 10/2 (1990): 177–195 (179).

2 Band, “Swallowing Jonah,” 179. Cf. also Philip Peter Jensen who offers a helpful overview of the numerous renditions of irony, satire, and parody regarding the book of Jonah that have emerged in recent years, including the work of John Miles (parody), John Holbert (satire), David Marcus (satire), James Ackermann (satire), and Uriel Simon (irony); see Philip Peter Jensen, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah: A Theological Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2008), 33–34.

3 Yvonne Sherwood, “Cross-Currents in the Book of Jonah: Some Jewish and Cultural Midrashim on a Traditional Text,” *BibInt* 6/1 (1998): 49–79 (55).

4 Sherwood, “Cross-Currents,” 53–54; Jensen, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 34.

Jonah is derided for his refusal to serve as a channel of God's boundless mercy.⁵ Uriel Simon captures this line of interpretation well:

Nothing is more ridiculous than a prophet who tries to run away from God (whose dominion over sea and land he evidently acknowledges), who sleeps soundly while the ship is in danger of foundering, and who must be summoned to pray to his God by the pagan captain. Moreover, there is delicious irony in God's frustration with Jonah's plans: the man who tries to run away from his prophetic vocation unintentionally increases the gentile sailors' reverence for the LORD; the man who flees from his God toward death must eventually call to him, even against his will, from the belly of a fish.⁶

Yet as Sherwood rightly warns us, the comedic laughter at the expense of the foolhardy prophet may be just a little bit too hearty.⁷ Such readings tend to "insist upon one exclusive claim to the truth," in which the lines between the author's intention, the interpreter's position, and what is imagined to be God's view are blurred. Sherwood writes that ironic interpretations often come to represent "a projection of the critic's own ideology—with "our writer" emerging "as an ambassador for the critics' values," which in the case of many of the ironic interpretations of Jonah turns out to be that of "a liberal-minded pre-Christian Jew, a true ecumenical, who 'opens the door to a wider and more tolerant viewpoint' and sets himself in opposition to a particular ultra-nationalistic Jewish group."⁸

5 Robert P. Carroll calls Jonah a "figure of fun," a "schlemiel" who evokes "great hilarity among readers"; see his "Is Humour Also Among the Prophets?" in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner, BLS 23 (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 180. Cf. also Mark E. Biddle's assessment of Jonah: "Someone in this story looks even more foolish than cows at a prayer meeting," *A Time to Laugh: Humor in the Bible* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 70.

6 Uriel Simon, *Jonah: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Bible Commentary (trans. L. J. Schramm; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), xxi.

7 Sherwood, "Cross-Currents," 59.

8 Sherwood, "Cross-Currents," 57–58. Though this line of interpretation is, as Thomas M. Bolin points out, representative of "a Christian caricature of post-exilic Judaism informed by a deeply ingrained anti-Jewish reading that goes back ... to Jerome's commentary on Jonah" ("Eternal Delight And Deliciousness: The Book Of Jonah After Ten Years," *JHebS* 9/4 (2007): 2–3), the Jewish commentator Uriel Simon's application of irony in the book of Jonah cited above demonstrates that not all ironic interpretations necessarily fit this characterization.

Given Band's insightful observation that there is "no irony in a position which insists upon one exclusive claim to the truth," it is a question whether such monolithic interpretations of Jonah do justice to the contradictions and ambiguities in the book, as well as in the various interpretative contexts associated with the Jonah narrative.⁹

This essay continues the conversation on irony in the book of Jonah by highlighting a number of creative contradictions or incongruous truths in this multifaceted narrative that adhere to Band's definition of irony as "entertain[ing] two contradictory positions simultaneously."¹⁰ As I will argue in the final section of this essay, to embrace ambiguity as an integral part of any ironic reading of the book of Jonah, as well as be aware of the inevitable connection between irony and ideology, has important theological and ethical implications for the various interpretative contexts in which this book is explicated, as well as also for the task of biblical interpretation in general.

2 Creative Contradictions

2.1 *Saved and Not Saved: The Case of Jonah/the People of Yehud*

Questions of salvation or deliverance are at the heart of the book of Jonah. One already sees this emphasis on being saved in the ambiguity surrounding Jonah's fate. The renegade prophet finds himself on a boat in a stormy sea, trying to escape the God whose dominion over heaven and earth presumably extends to the ocean on which Jonah had cast his lot. In all expectation, the prophet, who requested to be hurled overboard to appease the angry Storm God who has unleashed weapons of wind and extreme weather upon the sea,

9 Many interpretations that discern satire, parody, and comedy in the book of Jonah exhibit distinct political implications. Several scholars have identified the danger of anti-Semitic interpretations arising from extending the idea of a closed-minded exclusivist Jewish group assumed in this book to Judaism in general. Cf. e.g., Sherwood, "Cross-Currents," 57–58; Thomas M. Bolin, *Freedom Beyond Forgiveness: The Book of Jonah Re-examined* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 58–60; Bolin, "Eternal Delight," 2; Jensen, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 34.

10 Band, "Swallowing Jonah," 179. My work builds on Carolyn J. Sharp's chapter on irony in the book of Jonah, which acknowledges some of the interpretations that target Jonah, but argues that also "other plausible and intelligent readings have been proposed, each responding to one or several aspects of the ironizing that goes on in Jonah. No single view has commanded a consensus in the field." See Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 179.

would drown. However, against the odds and quite ironically, Jonah survives when he is swallowed by a big fish appearing out of nowhere.¹¹

Jonah's miraculous deliverance by means of a large sea monster is in conversation with the traditional way of portraying God as the Liberator God who, in Exodus 14–15, with a mighty hand, delivered the people of Israel from bondage—the poetic version of these events in Exodus 15 containing some allusions to the ancient Near Eastern accounts that portrayed a battle between god and the sea, imaged as a sea monster.¹² Such primordial imagery finds further expression in e.g. Isa 55:9, in which one encounters the image of the Liberator/Warrior God “who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the dragon” (cf. also Isa 27:1). In the story of Jonah, though, the sea monster ironically is presented as the means by which Jonah survives.¹³

It is a question whether this act of deliverance is deliverance after all. Not only is the big fish reminiscent of the sea monster or the Leviathan elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, and actually may epitomize the forces of chaos that now are threatening to engulf Jonah, but also the verb “to swallow” used in Jonah 1:17 can be said to harbor negative connotations in the Hebrew Bible (cf. e.g. being swallowed by Sheol).¹⁴ Carolyn Sharp captures this ambiguity associated with Jonah's deliverance well when she argues, “Jonah's prayer for deliverance is heard not (only) as prayer asking deliverance from drowning but also and more finally, as prayer asking deliverance from his dark and pungent place of captivity.”¹⁵

Thus, even though Jonah may be rescued from drowning by a big fish, sent by the same God who had sent (cf. the repetition of the term מנה “to appoint” or “send”) the storm that is responsible for the prophet being submerged by

11 Alan Cooper rightly notes that the narrative portrayal of Jonah's rescue by a big fish is filled with irony: “People drown when they are tossed into a tempestuous sea,” so in that sense, Jonah is “refuting ... something taken for granted about the way things work in the world.” See Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice: The Significance of the Book of Jonah,” in *Among the Prophets: Language, Imagery and Structure in the Prophetic Writings*, ed. David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup 144 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 144–163 (144).

12 James Limburg, *Jonah*, OTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 61; Jenson, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 61. Cf. also Scott B. Noegel, “Jonah and Leviathan: Inner-Biblical Allusions and the Problem with Dragons,” *Henoch* 37/2 (2015): 236–260 (242–244).

13 Band notes that contrary to the motif of the hero conquering the dragon/Leviathan in many ancient Near Eastern texts, “Jonah ... does not crush the great fish, but is first swallowed then vomited by him” (“Swallowing Jonah,” 186).

14 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 179. Sharp draws on the work of Kenneth Craig, who, given the negative associations of “to swallow” in the Hebrew Bible, points to Jonah's misunderstanding of being “rescued” from drowning by the big fish. See Craig, *A Poetics of Jonah: Art in the Service of Ideology* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 87.

15 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 179.

the chaos waters of the ocean, to be swallowed by a sea monster may signify a liminal situation of being saved and *not* saved at the same time. This ironic portrayal extends furthermore to Jonah's application of the traditional understanding of God as a gracious and compassionate Liberator God in Jonah 4:2, which constitutes a purposefully revised version of Exodus 34:6–7. Through his creative engagement with the tradition, Jonah conveys that he knows God to be “gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and ready to relent from punishing.” However, Jonah's words offer a sharp contrast to his own reality. As Sharp points out, Jonah does *not* know these words to be true in his own life as this “theological claim has not been borne out by events in Jonah's experience in any case.”¹⁶

In his prayer from inside the belly of the big fish in chapter 2, Jonah is thus shown to be in conversation with the lament tradition as he employs some of the classic formulations from the psalms of lament, which in the case of the psalm in Jonah 2, literalize metaphorical expressions of the believer's experience of sinking into the deep, of entering Sheol.¹⁷ However, it is quite ironic that Jonah is using this language from the tradition that portrays God as a Deliverer God, all the while *not* feeling that God is delivering him.¹⁸ The prophet's experience of not being saved continues in Jonah 4 when the prophet is left without shelter outside the city of Nineveh, angry enough to die.¹⁹

The contradiction of Jonah being saved and not saved is mirrored further in the fate of Jerusalem and her inhabitants, which repeatedly has been threatened and eventually destroyed by the hand of mighty empires but nevertheless has survived, as is evident in the very existence of this prophetic book that was penned by the Judeans who survived in order to write the story. Reflecting survivors' individual and collective journey to existentially, as well as theologically, make sense of the trauma that had befallen them, the incongruity of

16 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 181.

17 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 178. John A. Miles highlights the prevalence of pit and water imagery in Jonah 2 that is reminiscent of the lament psalms, e.g. Psalms 69 and 84, “Laughing at the Bible: Jonah as Parody,” in *On Humour and the Comic in the Hebrew Bible*, ed. Athalya Brenner, BLS 23 (Sheffield: Almond, 1990), 209.

18 Sharp, *Irony and Meaning*, 181. Sharp points also to God's lack of compassion, which tends to be the dominant message in much of the biblical prophets; in numerous passages in e.g. Ezekiel, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, God is shown not to spare and not to pity his people (183–184). As she concludes: “God never spares, and Jonah knows it” (185).

19 Cf. Rhiannon Graybill's essay reading the character of Jonah through the lens of Sara Ahmed's “Melancholic Migrant,” with Jonah perched outside the city of Nineveh, unable “to let go of his past experiences or past hurt,” “Prophecy and the Problem of Happiness: The Case of Jonah.” in *Reading with Feeling, Affect Theory and the Bible*, ed. Fiona C. Black and Jennifer L. Koosed, SemeiaSt 95 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2019), 95–112 (106).

Jonah being saved and *not* saved captures the broader question living in the hearts and minds of many individuals and the community as a whole in the postexilic community in which this book is penned: Why would a gracious God allow Jerusalem to be invaded, and not once, but three times?²⁰

In this regard, some of the exilic motifs that have been identified in terms of the book of Jonah are worth exploring. Daniel Smith-Christopher highlights an interesting connection between Jonah being swallowed by the big fish and Israel being in exile, drawing inspiration from the intriguing text in Jeremiah 51:34 that speaks of Nebuchadrezzar, the Babylonian king, swallowing Israel like a sea monster and ultimately vomiting him out.²¹ Even though there are distinct differences between these texts, it nevertheless is interesting to consider how traumatic memories of imperial invasion and destruction inform the story of Jonah, epitomized by the experience of being devoured by the forces of chaos as represented by the Neo-Babylonian empire.²² According to Carey Walsh, the distant memories of “two political destructions,” i.e., Nineveh by the Neo-Babylonian empire as well the Northern Kingdom having succumbed to the Assyrians, would have “offer[ed] sobering self-reflection on the most painful destruction in memory, that of the Jerusalem in which the intended readers dwelt.” As she writes: “Trauma and recovery both pierce the imagination in re-readings of this story, as the audience collectively entertained the multiple destructions that were not reserved for Israel’s enemies.”²³

20 Cf. Stephen Derek Cook’s exploration of “Jonah as a Satirical Challenge to Theodicy of the Exile,” in which he makes the point that the Assyrian invasion of the Northern Kingdom of Israel (722/721 BCE) and the Babylonian invasion and exile of Jerusalem and Judah (587/586 BCE) similar to other calamities throughout Jewish history including “the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, the European pogroms and expulsions, and the Nazi mass murders,” all raised similar questions for the survivors and future generations as they were seeking to “come to terms with their anguish and the theological implications of theodicies which offered little comfort.” See Cook, “Who Knows? Reading the Book of Jonah as a Satirical Challenge to Theodicy of the Exile” (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 2019), 272. Cf. also Terence Fretheim’s exposition on “Jonah and Theodicy,” *ZAW* 90 (1978): 227–237.

21 Daniel Smith-Christopher, *A Biblical Theology of Exile*, OBT (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002), 132–133.

22 David J. Downs argues that the traumatic memories of the Babylonian invasion and exile continue to “haunt the story of Jonah,” casting a “spectral shadow across Jonah’s narrative,” “The Specter of Exile in the Story of Jonah,” *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 31 (2009): 27–44 (40).

23 Carey Walsh, “The Metaprophetic God of Jonah,” in *History, Memory, Hebrew Scriptures: A Festschrift for Ehud Ben Zvi*, ed. Diane Gersoni-Edelman and Ian Douglas Wilson (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 259–274 (265).

In this way, Jonah emerges as a representative of the people of Yehud who is challenging the tradition, and the God represented in it. According to Walsh, the book of Jonah finds itself more at home among the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible than the Hebrew Bible Prophets, where it typically is included in the Book of Twelve. Much like Job as well as Qoheleth, the book of Jonah exemplifies a theological position that questions God, as well as theological traditions that propagated an unambiguous cause-and-effect understanding of God's relationship to suffering that likely was triggered by the traumatic reality in which the people of Yehud found themselves.²⁴ In particular, it is the ambiguities surrounding the fate of Nineveh, as well as the nature of God that are intrinsically connected to this ongoing process of meaning-making that employs irony to come to terms with the past and ongoing effects of imperial subjugation.

2.2 *Destroyed and Not Destroyed: The Case of Nineveh*

A second contradiction that permeates an ironic reading of the book of Jonah concerns the fate of Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, with Nineveh's destruction/salvation being intrinsically connected to whether the people of Judah's will survive or not. In this regard, the so-called "double ending" of the book of Jonah is worth noting. Jonah is fuming because Nineveh is *not* destroyed—more due to the fact of God's unfathomable mercy than Jonah's rhetorical prowess. As Walsh, drawing on the work of Ehud Ben Zvi, rightly points out, postexilic readers of Yehud would have known that even though Nineveh is *not* destroyed in the literary world imagined in the book of Jonah, in the real world, Nineveh, in 612 BCE, was destroyed after all—and had not been rebuilt for generations to come.²⁵

In these two mutually exclusive statements held in tension, the paradoxical statements that Nineveh is destroyed and *not* destroyed serve the function of creating the space for readers to question some of the major theological and existential issues pertaining to the nature of God and the relationship between God and suffering. For instance, the incongruity between these two statements already is picked up by the early Jewish interpreter, Abravanel, whose question Alan Cooper echoes and rephrases concerning Jonah: "Why does God allow a wicked nation to prosper, only to destroy it later on for the self-same wickedness?"²⁶ According to Cooper, the theological incongruity underlying

24 Walsh, "Metaphoric God of Jonah," 266–267; Bolin, "Eternal Delight," 3, 6.

25 Walsh, "Metaphoric God of Jonah," 261; Ehud Ben Zvi, *The Signs of Jonah: Reading and Rereading in Ancient Yehud* (New York: Bloomsbury, T&T Clark, 2003), 15.

26 Cooper, "In Praise of Divine Caprice," 149.

the question of why “God seems to be so inconsistent and unpredictable” is to assert God’s freedom to save (or one could also say to destroy), whoever, and however, God so desire. In the process, God is utilizing the wind (1:4; 4:8), the blazing sun (4:8), the Phoenicians (1:6), the Assyrians (3:9), the great fish (2:1) and a tiny worm (4:7) to “teach[ing] Jonah what he knew all along, namely that ‘deliverance is the LORD’s’ (2:10).”²⁷

I would argue that read through the lens of contemporary approaches such as postcolonial biblical interpretation and trauma hermeneutics, the real question underlying this contradiction of whether Nineveh is destroyed and *not* destroyed is much more existential. What is fueling Jonah’s anger is the question of how God could save a ferocious empire represented by the Assyrian capital if God knew that they would come back to destroy Jerusalem.²⁸ Walsh says it well: “Jonah is a figure in limbo, as a prophet who is himself in exile and does not understand his god. As such, he embodies some of the confusion of a people living after the divine judgment of exile.”²⁹ Serving as “a cipher to mediate the community’s pained questioning,” the angry prophet may be viewed “as a proxy voice for the theological questioning brought on by exile.”³⁰

In the literary world conjured by the book of Jonah, people are allowed to face their God, and specifically the full weight of the theological tradition that portrayed God as using the imperial forces of Babylonia and Assyria as divine instruments of destruction (Isa 5:26; 10:5; 13:5). Jonah finds himself outside of Israel, perched on a hill overlooking the city of Nineveh—a location that, according to Walsh, serves as an alternative space, “a liminal, safe site for theological experimentation to occur.”³¹ It is the two incongruous truths associated with the majestic imperial center, which looms large in the book of Jonah, all the while having been destroyed long ago, that is responsible for yet another contradiction associated with an ironic reading of the book of Jonah, i.e., that God is merciful and *not* merciful at the same time.

27 Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 151–152.

28 Cf. recent postcolonial treatments of Jonah that read the book in terms of the deep wounds caused by colonization in, e.g., Ryu’s South Korean context (“Silence as Resistance”), as well as the ongoing imperial presence in Havea’s context of Oceania (“Adjusting Jonah”).

29 Walsh, “Metaphrophic God of Jonah,” 265.

30 Walsh, “Metaphrophic God of Jonah,” 265–266. Cf. also Elizabeth Boase and Sarah Agnew’s essay reading the book of Jonah through the lens of trauma hermeneutics: they outline compellingly how the prophet and his community can be said to have been traumatized by the Exile and its aftermath, “‘Whispered in the Sound of Silence:’ Traumatizing the Book of Jonah,” *The Bible & Critical Theory* 12/1 (2016): 4–22.

31 Walsh, “Metaphrophic God of Jonah,” 266.

2.3 *Merciful and Not Merciful: The Case of God*

At the heart of an ironic interpretation of the book of Jonah is the purposeful revision of Exodus 34:6–7 as it finds expression in the prophet's challenge to God in Jonah 4:2.³² Arguing for a parodic interpretation of the original credo, Marcus contends that in Jonah 4:2, Exodus 34:6–7 is utilized with an intention other than the purposes to which that tradition is put elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible (e.g. Ps 103:8; 145:8; Neh 9:17). Whereas God typically is praised for being merciful and tolerant of wrongdoing, in Jonah 4:2, the prophet is enraged precisely *because* God is merciful and tolerant of wrongdoing.³³

One sees, for instance, how the phrase that God executes punishment for generations to come (Exod 34:7) has been replaced by the reference that God relents or abstains from punishing people in both Jon 4:2 and Joel 2:3. However, even though both Jonah 4 and Joel 2 introduce the idea that God refrains from or “renounces” (Joel 2:3) punishment, Marcus points out that “whereas the credo is used in Joel to exalt God for his merciful qualities for relenting at His people’s repentance,” Jonah ironically employs the divergence in interpretation to challenge God’s inexplicable tolerance of evil.³⁴

Indeed, God is portrayed in the book of Jonah as merciful, overturning his intention to overturn Nineveh (הַנִּינְוִי) in response to the earnest contrition displayed by the Ninevite king, and all of the Ninevite subjects, even the animals. It is significant that this reversal of the prophetic word in the book of Jonah, itself is reversed in the book of Nahum, found after Jonah canonically. Aligned with the “double ending” of Jonah, Jonah’s readers in all likelihood would also have in mind the book of Nahum, in which the vivid portrayal of the destruction of the Assyrian capital as a result of God’s wrath introduces once more the possibility that God is portrayed in the book of Jonah as merciful and *not* merciful at the same time.³⁵ For scholars such as Alan Cooper, these contradictions underscore the notion of divine freedom in the book of Jonah, i.e., the notion that God’s actions are unpredictable, inexplicable, and that God is “absolutely free to do as [God] chooses.”³⁶

The contradictions associated with Nineveh’s (and Jerusalem’s) fate that are intrinsically associated with the ambiguity surrounding God’s mercy, moreover, raise questions concerning the possibility of forgiveness, and to what

32 Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 148.

33 David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, BJS 301 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990), 127.

34 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 126–127.

35 Walsh, “Metaphorical God of Jonah,” 270; Ben Zvi, *Signs of Jonah*, 27.

36 Cooper, “In Praise of Divine Caprice,” 150. Bolin has argued for a divine portrayal of a God who may forgive at will and revoke that forgiveness as well (*Freedom Beyond Forgiveness*, 145–146; “Eternal Delight,” 3).

extent human repentance has any effect on God. The placement of Jonah just before Nahum in the Book of the Twelve may be interpreted as signaling to the reader that, as Cooper formulates it, "God did not utterly renounce their punishment; he only put it off for a while."³⁷

As part of what Walsh describes as a "sapiential critique of prophecy," the existential crisis wrought by the trauma of exile generated new theological questions in the book of Jonah that challenged the traditional understanding of God as found in the Latter Prophets, and as I argue below, also in the Torah. Whereas the book of Job imagined an alternative to the dominant notion of retribution that has marked much of the Hebrew Bible tradition including Deuteronomy, Proverbs, and the Prophets, Walsh notes that the book of Jonah "under the cover of fiction" includes and addresses "voices of theological discontent" that not only leaves the theme of God's mercy ambivalent by the end of the book but also uproots the conventional understanding that draws a connection between God's wrath and human transgressions.³⁸ It is this portrayal of Jonah, questioning of the tradition as represented by the Torah and the Latter Prophets, which informs a final ironic contradiction concerning the way the tradition, or one could say the Torah was considered to be set in stone, and at the same time, *not* set in stone.

2.4 *Set in Stone and Not Set in Stone: The Case of the Torah*

One way to entertain the mutually exclusive theological traditions associated with God's mercy and propensity towards forgiveness associated with the divine portrayal in Jonah stems from the narrative context of Exodus 34:6–7 in which the original self-assertion of God is embedded. Exodus 34 constitutes God's second attempt to represent the Torah on two stone tablets, seeing that an enraged Moses had shattered the first set in response to the people's lawlessness (Exod 32:19). In Exodus 34:1, God instructs Moses to "Carve two tablets of stone like the first, as I will inscribe upon the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you shattered." It is in this context that God, who earlier had revealed Godself to be the "I Am Who I Am" (אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה in Exod 3:14), further expounds on the divine identity in a series of epithets that emphasize God's compassion and forgiveness (Exod 34:6–7). Furthermore, in response to Moses' intercessory prayer on behalf of the stubborn people, God reestablishes the covenant between the people and God, a sign that God had heeded Moses' plea for mercy and forgiveness.³⁹

37 Cooper, "In Praise of Divine Caprice," 150.

38 Walsh, "Metaphrophic God of Jonah," 263, 267.

39 Band, "Swallowing Jonah," 181.

What is interesting in the reinterpretation of Exodus 34 in the book of Jonah is that the narrative account of the giving of the law in itself constitutes a re-inscription in the form of the second set of stone tablets. According to Band, this interpretative fluidity reflected in the original story “allows or even necessitates the ambiguities of the book [of Jonah] and offers a cardinal model of re-inscription.”⁴⁰

Continuing this notion of re-inscription in Jonah, the prophet representing the people of Yehud is citing tradition, but also modifying the tradition to reflect the contradictory statements that God is merciful but also at the same time *not* merciful, as evident in the inevitable destruction of Nineveh that seems to be spared in the book of Jonah. But this notion that God is merciful and *not* merciful also can be said to represent a serious existential and theological crisis experienced by the prophet and the people of Yehud during the postexilic period in which the book of Jonah is set. The contradictory statements that God is both merciful and *not* merciful at the same time, inclined to punish as well as to relent from punishment, capture the ongoing journey of the ancient scribes to bring a prior understanding of God into conversation with the community's current experiences marked by the unresolved and ongoing trauma characterizing the postexilic period. These divergent traditions concerning God's mercy, which pick up on the notion of the re-inscription of the stone tablets in the Exodus 34 narrative, attest to what Walsh describes as “a fluidity in the tradition based on different times and circumstances in Israel's history more than it does a fixed creedal formula.”⁴¹ Moreover, the creative appropriation of Exod 34:6–7 in the book of Jonah, and in particular Jonah's expression of anger at God for being “who tradition claims he is” underscores the fact that the earliest interpreters of the biblical text already knew, i.e., that the traditional formulations for God passed on through the generations are part of a living tradition, which change with people as their circumstances change.⁴² As Walsh formulates this position:

40 Band, “Swallowing Jonah,” 182. Band writes, “the re-inscription of the second pair of tablets differs from parody, which implies a distortion of the original, not a duplication as in the case of the second tablets.”

41 Walsh, “Metaphorical God of Jonah,” 264.

42 Walsh, “Metaphorical God of Jonah,” 263. Barbara Green argues that “ancient tradition is made freshly relevant and is itself enhanced while it strengthens new readers,” *Jonah's Journeys* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 48.

The literati seem to be intuiting the limits of their work, namely, that while religious texts instruct, they also retain significant ambiguities and uncertainties about the divine will. The textual collection, then, is not an information storehouse, but a space for self-reflection, conflict, healing, and processing the trauma of exile.⁴³

It is important to consider how the Torah is proverbially set in stone, but also at the same time *not* set in stone. Jason Rosenblatt and Joseph Sitterson draw on a story told in the Babylonian Talmud that is an explication of Deuteronomy 30:11–12: “Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?” In the Talmud account, Rabbi Eliezer is involved in an argument about what constitutes an unclean oven. After exhausting all possible arguments, he ends up invoking divine authority, saying: “If the law agrees with me, let it be proven from Heaven.” Whereupon a heavenly voice cried out [to the sages], “What are you next to R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the law agrees with him?” R. Joshua stood up and said, “It is not in heaven.”⁴⁴ This story ends with Rabbi Nathan offering up the divine response when he is imagined to have asked the prophet Elijah what God did when He had heard Rabbi Joshua’s response: According to Elijah, God laughed, saying, “My children have defeated me, My children have defeated me.”⁴⁵

Rosenblatt and Sitterson invoke this anecdote to make a hermeneutical point that also may apply to the ironic use of the Torah in the book of Jonah. They argue that the phrase “not in heaven” represents the idea that “the authority of the fixed, written Torah (Deut. 30:12)” is replaced “with that of the fluid, oral Torah, in which R. Joshua is saying that those commandments are in fact beyond God’s reach.”⁴⁶ And according to Rosenblatt and Sitterson, “God’s laugh of endorsement at the scene’s end indicates that this new meaning is also a part of his eternal Torah.”⁴⁷

43 Walsh, “Metaphorical God of Jonah,” 265.

44 Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Baba Metzia, 59a, b. Cited in Jason Rosenblatt and Joseph Sitterson, “Introduction,” *Not in Heaven: Coherence and Complexity in the Biblical Narrative*, ed. Jason Rosenblatt and Joseph Sitterson, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 2.

45 Rosenblatt and Sitterson, “Introduction,” 1–3.

46 Rosenblatt and Sitterson, “Introduction,” 3.

47 Rosenblatt and Sitterson, “Introduction,” 3.

3 Feminist and Postcolonial Implications

I have identified a number of creative contradictions that form part of an ironic reading of the book of Jonah. These interconnected incongruities associated with Jonah (and Jerusalem or the people of Yehud) being saved and *not* being saved; of Nineveh being destroyed and *not* being destroyed; of God being merciful and *not* being merciful, and finally, of the Torah being set in stone and *not* set in stone, together move the attention away from the poor prophet Jonah who for such a long time in the history of reception was the object of ridicule, taken as the epitome of narrowmindedness.

However, beyond the noble quest of saving Jonah, much more is at stake in contemplating the importance of entertaining contradictions when it comes to our interpretation of the book of Jonah, and biblical interpretation in general. So it is interesting to note that it is postcolonial interpreters who have been, in particular, invested in defending Jonah—their writings offering an empathetic reading of the prophet, who is representing the traumatized people of Yehud that have suffered greatly under the yoke of imperial subjugation in the wake of imperial invasion and devastation. Postcolonial, as well as feminist and queer interpreters, have in common that they (we) feel uncomfortable when anyone, even a literary figure such as Jonah, is painted in monochrome colors, and for that matter, not very flattering colors. Many women, LGBTQI individuals, and subalterns have been framed, classified, constructed, and derided—by biblical texts as well as by ancient and contemporary interpreters. Socially engaged biblical interpreters are invested in subverting fixed categories, thus moving beyond binaries that have done, and continue to do, much harm.

Socially engaged interpreters have had to deal with questions concerning the authority of Scripture in which the author's intention, typically equated with God's will, must be exposed as a reflection of the interpreter's ideology, something that was evident in the work of interpreters who engage in ironic readings of Jonah. It is thus no wonder that postcolonial, feminist, and queer biblical interpreters prefer ambiguity over simplicity, complexity over singularity. Sharp, who employs "ambiguity in biblical texts as a potentially subversive resource with which to dismantle oppressive structures and ideological distortions," captures this position shared by many feminist, postcolonial and queer interpreters in the following way:

Ambiguity invites the response of voices, perspectives, and truths that cannot be mastered by the utterances of official rhetoric, whether that be the master narrative of the Deuteronomic History, the canons of

ecclesial interpretation, or the dominant norms of the Society of Biblical Literature.⁴⁸

This essay's focus on "entertaining contradictions," in terms of exploring irony in the book of Jonah, aligns with Sherwood's proposal of reading the book "as a game, a parody, a dialogic text" inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of the dialogical imagination.⁴⁹ According to a dialogic reading of Jonah, "a subversive ideology" may coincide "with the orthodox voice," without the tradition being submerged or dissolved into the new creation.⁵⁰ In an understanding that embraces ambiguity, Jonah emerges from being swallowed by the big fish, simultaneously delivered and not delivered, as an example of what the rabbis have described as a "perfect prophet" who, according to Sherwood, "echoes and then subverts and challenges God's word"—from within the tradition, "resist[ing], play[ing] with and challeng[ing] the sacred texts."⁵¹

As the painstaking work of postcolonial, feminist, and queer interpreters has made clear, a great deal is at stake in readings that embrace ambiguity and celebrate paradox. Entertaining contradictions is an ongoing act of resistance, undoing fixed interpretative structures an act of liberation as interpreters desperately seek to undo monopoly and hegemony in the biblical texts that mirror and impact their reality. For they know all too well that, even though the empire may be destroyed, as represented by the contradiction cited above of Nineveh being destroyed and not destroyed, the empire still very much remains present as evident in the ongoing forms of subjugation in contexts near and far.

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49 Sherwood, "Cross-Currents," 61.

50 Sherwood, "Cross-Currents," 62.

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PART 4

Irony in the Deuterocanonical Books



“Foiled by the Hand of a Woman”: Irony in the Book of Judith

Stephen D. Cook

It has been said of the book of *Judith*¹ that “no biblical book is so quintessentially ironic as Judith”² and Carey Moore describes the writer as “an ironist *extraordinaire*” who often means the opposite of what he says.³ Almost everything about *Judith* is ironic: its major and minor characters, historical details, various place names, and the overall plot are all ironic. One of the basic features of irony is that an ironist appears to be saying one thing, while the reality is they are actually saying something quite different, and saying it in such a way that activates an endless series of subversive interpretations.⁴ The irony in *Judith* is accompanied by exaggeration, humor, and satire, coming together to create a powerful and entertaining drama which may have also been intended to serve as subversive resistance literature, ridiculing the enemy while entertaining one’s allies. As such it bears some similarities with other biblical novellas such as Esther, Daniel, and Jonah, and may shed further light on them.

1 Judith and Holofernes

Although the character after whom the book is named does not appear until about halfway through the story (being first mentioned in Jdt 8:1), the writer’s use of a triple repetition of the phrase ἐν χειρὶ θηλείας “by the hand of a woman” (9:10; 13:15; 16:5) emphasizes that her slaying of Holofernes is the central irony of the story. I will consequently deal with it first, even though it is out of order, and subsequently return to irony in the introductory material. The triple repetition ensures that the reader or listener does not miss the irony that the mighty Assyrian army was undone not only by an insignificant nation,

1 To distinguish between the book of Judith and its principal character, the name of the book is italicized.

2 Carey Moore, “Judith, Book of,” *ABD* 3:1117–1125, 1121.

3 Carey Moore, *Judith: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 40 (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 78–85.

4 Douglas C. Muecke, *Irony and the Ironic*, 2nd ed. (London: Methuen, 1982), 31–33.

nor even by a small unknown village, nor by a mere contingent of warriors, but by a single woman. The writer may very well have borrowed the phrase from the story of Deborah, where the similarities with Jael killing Sisera are unmistakable (Judg 4:9).⁵ For a warrior to be killed by a woman is particularly ironic as women, rather than engaging as combatants in war, were considered instead as trophies of war and chattels, catalogued with livestock and other spoils, and often taken into slavery.⁶ The influence of Judges 4–5 on *Judith* may have been predicated by the evident ironic reversal in the account of the death of Sisera. In this story Sisera's mother wondered why her son delayed in returning from battle and postulated that they were "finding and dividing the spoil, a girl or two for every man" (Judg 5:28–30). "The irony of her words is clear to the reader, who knows that Sisera will never come home from the battle because he has fallen by the hand of a woman."⁷

We should not be mistaken in thinking that the writer had a proto-feminist agenda in casting a woman as the victor.⁸ In her prayer before setting out for the Assyrian camp from Bethulia (9:2–14), Judith referred to the story of the rape of Dinah (Gen 34) and her ancestor Simeon's vengeance against Shechem ben Hamor and the males of his community. She equated the Assyrians who "intend to defile your sanctuary, and to pollute the tabernacle" with the rapist of the Dinah story (Jdt 9:8). Yet, ironically, in both Genesis 34 and Judith 9 women are specifically mentioned as *victims* in the act of revenge: "You gave up their wives for booty and their daughters to captivity" (Jdt 9:4; cf. Gen 34:29). As Alice Bach notes, Judith is here portrayed as a female who has "stolen male

5 The Septuagint of Judg 4:9 has ἐν χειρὶ γυναικὸς, which translates the Hebrew בַּיַּד־אִשָּׁה (*by the hand of a woman*) faithfully. While the Septuagint regularly uses θηλείας to translate נִקְבָּה (*female*) the difference between θηλείας (female) in Judith and γυναικὸς (woman) in Judges is unlikely to be significant. For a discussion of *Judith's* dependence on the Jael and Sisera story see Sidnie Ann White, "In the Steps of Jael and Deborah: Judith as Heroine," in *No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. VanderKam; Vol. 2 of *ECL* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 5–16. Philip F. Esler discusses a number of similarities between the stories as well as other intertextual connections, and further, argues for a connection with the David and Goliath story in the Septuagint version of 1 Samuel 17, listing 22 similarities. See Esler, *Sex, Wives, and Warriors: Reading Old Testament Narrative With its Ancient Audience* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 258–299.

6 Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 83–86. See also Jdt 9:4.

7 Thomas M. Bolin, "Warfare," in *The Biblical World*, Vol. 11, ed. John Barton (London: Routledge, 2002), 33–52, here 42.

8 Jan Willem van Henten raises the possibility of a female author and argues for female voices in the book. See van Henten, "Judith as an Alternative Leader: a Rereading of Judith 7–13," in *A Feminist Companion to Esther, Judith and Susannah*, ed. Athalya Brenner, FCB 7 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 225, 245–252.

power.”⁹ Despite individual women being the victors in these stories, women *en masse* are always victims in war, an irony which may not have been intended by the writer but is nevertheless latent in the text.

The loss (or theft) of male power, as Bach puts it, is also a feature of the Jael story and Margarita Stocker thinks the story of Jael is “very much a truncated version of *Judith*.”¹⁰ In both stories the heroine is first a seductress. In fact, as Bach points out, “the tropes of beautiful women seducing men with food or wine and then killing them instead of soothing them” probably “represent the generalized male fear of the courtesan as killer”—these female courtesans are simultaneously the source of their victims’ cravings and their dread.¹¹ In this respect Jael and Judith differ from the Philistine Delilah (who seduced the Israelite Samson) in dispatching their enemies only insofar as Delilah was on the wrong side. The *femme fatale* is a recurring trope, also evident in the story of Esther. While Ahasuerus is repeatedly portrayed in the Esther story with wine goblet in hand, and Holofernes drinks himself into a stupor, Sisera is overcome instead by indulging in Jael’s offer of milk (Judg 4:19; 5:25), an act which could either be an ironic reversal of the woman’s perceived role as nurturer, or a somewhat humorous humiliation of a military leader who was made drunk on milk.

For all Holofernes’ talk about wanting to seduce Judith (Jdt 12:11–12), the “sex-crazed”¹² Assyrian leaves it to the fourth day to attempt his seduction (12:10) and then when his opportunity arrives, he drinks “a great quantity of wine, much more than he had ever drunk in any one day since he was born” (12:20). The writer is having a joke here at Holofernes’ expense: he portrays him as a man who boasts of sexual conquest but is all talk, needing the fortifying effects of alcohol to overcome his inhibitions.¹³ When it comes time for the planned rendezvous with Judith in his tent, “he was dead drunk” (13:1). The conqueror first loses his virility, and then his head, an unwitting accomplice in his own demise.

9 Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal in Biblical Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 208.

10 Margarita Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior: Women and Power in Western Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998), 14.

11 Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 186, 207.

12 Lisa M. Wolfe, *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 235.

13 By contrast, when Ahasuerus was invited to attend Esther’s מִשְׁתֶּה *drinking feast*, he appeared to be more excited by the prospect of drinking than by the possibility of being seduced by the most beautiful woman in his empire.

In fact, Holofernes, “the best in the whole kingdom, the most informed and the most astounding in military strategy” (11:8), was defeated even before that fateful night, from the beginning of his encounter with Judith. Holofernes’ men were the first to be smitten: “They marveled at her beauty and admired the Israelites, judging them by her. They said to one another, ‘Who can despise these people, who have women like this among them? It is not wise to leave one of their men alive, for if we let them go they will be able to beguile the whole world!’” (10:19). The threat was exaggerated, but simply her appearance had sown fear in these hardened soldiers of the mighty Assyrian empire. It was then Judith, not Holofernes the great military strategist, who dictated the strategy. Rather than seek his permission, Judith laid out her plan to Holofernes as though she were speaking to an underling: “I will remain with you; but every night your servant will go out into the valley ... Then I will come and tell you ... Then I will lead you through Judea, until you come to Jerusalem; there I will set your throne” (11:16–19). Despite addressing Holofernes as “my lord” and referring to herself as “your servant,” Judith made it clear that she was the one in charge. There is an unmistakable irony in her assurance that “if you follow out the words of your servant, God will accomplish something through you, and my lord will not fail to achieve his purposes” (11:6). “The audience, of course, knows that when Judith mentions ‘my lord,’ she is secretly intending a reference to God, while Holofernes assumes it is a reference to him.”¹⁴ Judith further insisted on eating her own kosher food (12:1–2) and was given free rein to come and go at will to the Assyrian camp (12:7), which shows either remarkable restraint by Holofernes and his men, or thickheadedness.¹⁵ Ironically, the same bag which Judith used to carry her kosher food into the camp was used to carry out Holofernes’ severed head (13:9–10).¹⁶ Throughout this whole process Holofernes is portrayed as the deceived, not the deceiver. He accepts everything Judith says, even when she confirms the characterization of Israel by Achior, which he had earlier rejected. There is an ironic role reversal throughout the entire scene with Judith portrayed as commander and Holofernes as her subordinate.

14 Lawrence M. Wills, “The Jewish Novel,” in *The Biblical World*, ed. John Barton (London: Routledge, 2012), 158. Also Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior*, 7.

15 Erich S. Gruen, *Diaspora: Jews Amidst Greeks and Romans* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 166.

16 Stocker, *Judith, Sexual Warrior*, 9.

2 Holofernes and Achior

The dialogue between Holofernes and Achior is full of irony. Achior, the leader of the Ammonites who were allied with the Assyrians (or at least subservient to them), appears in the story in response to an intelligence-gathering meeting called by Holofernes (5:1–5). Achior provides Holofernes with a condensed history of Israel from their ancestral roots in Mesopotamia, highlighting the key events of their time in Egypt, their occupation of Canaan, the exile, and the return from exile. “Achior not only presents a review of Israel’s history, but also a theological evaluation of its history.”¹⁷ He presents a “Deuteronomic” appraisal of their situation: “As long as they did not sin against their God they prospered, for the God who hates iniquity is with them. But when they departed from the way he had prescribed for them, they were utterly defeated in many battles and were led away captive to a foreign land” (5:17–18).¹⁸ In Achior’s mind this was the key to their defeat: “if there is any oversight in this people and they sin against their God and we find out their offense, then we can go up and defeat them” (5:20). This claim was rejected by the other foreign contingents, and by Holofernes himself, who expelled Achior from the Assyrian camp with the words “you shall not see my face again from this day until I take revenge on this race that came out of Egypt” (6:5). Ironically, the next time Achior saw Holofernes’ face was when he was called to confirm the identity of his severed head (14:5–6). Holofernes’ rebuttal of Achior’s prophecy was also ironically reversed and Achior’s position was proved true.

In rejecting Achior’s “Deuteronomic” assessment of Israel’s situation Holofernes retorted, “we will strike them down as *one man*” (ἄνθρωπον ἓνα 6:3). Ironically, he was himself struck down by *one woman*. The entire speech by Holofernes is ironic, and his boast that “I have spoken, and none of my words shall fail to come true” (6:9) was proved empty by subsequent events. Even his turning over of Achior to the Israelites with the expectation that he “will perish along with them” (6:8) turned out to be the cause of Achior’s survival rather than his downfall. In an ironic reversal, after identifying the head of Holofernes, Achior converted to Judaism and was circumcised (14:10). He “believed firmly in God” (ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ σφόδρα), a phrase which echoes the Septuagint of Genesis 15:6 (“Abram believed in God,” ἐπίστευσεν Ἀβραμ τῷ θεῷ)

17 Pieter Venter, “The Function of the Ammonite Achior in the Book of Judith,” *HvTSt* 67, no. 3 (2011): 1–9, 4.

18 Cp. Deut 28–30; Judg 2:11–15.

and therefore ironically puts him on the level of the patriarch and portrays him as more faithful than the elders of Bethuliah.¹⁹

Also ironically, and anachronistically, Achior described the exile, the razing of Jerusalem, and the return from exile as *past* events (5:18–19) while addressing a general of the very king Nebuchadnezzar who had been responsible for the destruction of Jerusalem. In a further irony, the account of Israel's history by Achior was more accurate than that of the narrator. The narrator places the events of the book soon after the return from exile and more than fifty years after the Temple had been profaned (4:3), but confusingly has the Temple still standing (4:2).²⁰ By the time of the return from exile, Nebuchadnezzar was dead and Babylon was in the hands of the Persians. *Judith's* history is topsy-turvy! It is difficult to comprehend how the writer could have gotten it so wrong, unless it was deliberate.

Somewhat strangely for a hardened soldier, Achior fainted when he saw the head of Holofernes (14:6).²¹ Perhaps this is a further ironic reversal of stereotyped roles: his fainting, as Moore points out, “emphasized again Judith's courage and toughness” in contrast to his own weakness.²² Adolfo Roitman has argued that Achior functions in the story as a mirror image to Judith, acting as a kind of double or “alter ego.”²³ Achior not only knew Israel's history well, he also had a grasp of the “Deuteronomic” theodicy which explained Israel's troubles in terms of obedience or disobedience to God and articulated the same view as the people of Bethulia, who despaired that “God, the LORD of our ancestors, punishes us for our sins and the sins of our ancestors” (7:28). Surprisingly, he is also prepared to die with Israel as a kind of martyr. Judith, on the other hand, had a different theodicy and argued that the present generation did not worship idols as their ancestors had done and been punished for it

19 Adolfo D. Roitman, “Achior in the Book of Judith: His Role and Significance,” in *No One Spoke Ill of Her: Essays on Judith*, ed. James C. VanderKam, EJL 2 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1992), 40.

20 Possibly to avoid the difficulties, the Vulgate omits 5:18b and 19b (“they were led away captive to a foreign land. The temple of their God was razed to the ground, and their towns were occupied by their enemies ... and have come back from the places where they were scattered, and have occupied Jerusalem, where their sanctuary is, and have settled in the hill country, because it was uninhabited”) and 4:3 (“For they had only recently returned from exile, and all the people of Judea had just now gathered together, and the sacred vessels and the altar and the temple had been consecrated after their profanation”). While avoiding the contradiction Jerome may have unwittingly missed an intended irony. Moore regards the anachronistic verses as an early gloss (*Judith*, 147–148).

21 ἐξελύθη τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ more literally translates to “his breathing failed,” which probably means the same as “he fainted.”

22 Moore, *Judith*, 235.

23 Roitman, “Achior,” 38–40.

(7:18–19). They were, however, being put to a test by God (8:25–27). The retelling of Israel's history by Achior draws attention to the differences between a Deuteronomistic theodicy on one hand and Judith's reliance on God's mercy on the other, "the God of the lowly, helper of the oppressed, upholder of the weak, protector of the forsaken, savior of those without hope" (9:11).

Achior's speech to Holofernes about the causes of Israel's defeat, historically accurate and theologically orthodox (to a Deuteronomist), effectively parodied and hence ridiculed the Deuteronomistic tradition. The Deuteronomistic texts explained the exile on the basis that God punishes the sinful. A possible motive behind *Judith's* parodying of theological foundations would be to force an audience to rethink whether the earlier Deuteronomistic views were still relevant in light of Israel's changed circumstances in the Hasmonean period. The ironic humor in the exchange between Achior and Holofernes ridiculed Holofernes, while the contrasting views of Achior and Judith highlighted the inherent deficiencies in a Deuteronomistic theodicy. It is ironic that a distinctly Jewish theodicy was defended by the Ammonite, which sets it up to be challenged by Judith whose very name describes her as thoroughly Jewish. His conversion to Judaism came when he "saw all that the God of Israel had done" (14:10), which confirmed the validity of Judith's approach.

3 Ironic Pseudo-History

The contradictory and anachronistic treatment of the exile is not the only problem with the book's historicity. The first thing which strikes the reader is that *Judith* has all the trappings of historical narrative, although a reader who is familiar with biblical history will quickly note several historical and geographical inaccuracies, so many, in fact, that an irresistible conclusion is that the writer's blatant carelessness with the facts was deliberate.²⁴ While the story has a believable plot, someone even casually acquainted with biblical history will recognize several discrepancies. From the outset it "contains many historical and geographical contradictions or errors, inconsistencies and improbabilities."²⁵ For example, the story begins, "It was the twelfth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, who ruled over the Assyrians in the great city of Nineveh" (1:1). There are considerable problems here, first with

24 Further on historical inaccuracies in *Judith*, see Alan Millard, "Judith, Tobit, Ahikar and History," in *New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and the Millennium: Essays in Honour of Anthony Gelston*, ed. P. J. Harland and C. T. R. Hayward, VTSup 77 (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 195–203.

25 Roitman, "Achior," 31.

Nebuchadnezzar being called “king of Assyria” when he was actually king of *Babylonia*—“a designation that any Jewish audience would instantly recognize as absurd”²⁶—but also with the claim that he ruled in Nineveh when that city had been sacked and razed (in 612 BCE) during the reign of his predecessor Nabopolassar. In fact, almost everything in the first chapter is historically inaccurate, exaggerated, or unrealistic. Rather than being mere historical mistakes, these “errors” were probably a deliberate device by the writer to alert the reader or listener that what follows is fiction.²⁷ Deborah Gera says, “this is pseudo-history, not wrong history,”²⁸ and Wills characterizes this description of Nebuchadnezzar as “the parodying of biblical history with the introduction of a historically absurd figure.”²⁹

These pseudo-historical details also contain several ironies. After the “Assyrian” Nebuchadnezzar the reader is next introduced to Arphaxad, who “ruled over the Medes in Ecbatana” (1:1). The text contains an error followed by an exaggeration: no king of Media was named Arphaxad; and while Ecbatana (or Hamadan) was indeed the capital of Media, the given dimensions of the city in 1:2 are unrealistic.³⁰ The Median contemporary of Nebuchadnezzar 11

26 E. S. Gruen, “Novella,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. J. W. Rogerson and Judith M. Lieu (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 423. The writer may, of course, have understood Babylon and Nineveh as a *continuum*, as one had succeeded the other as capital of the empire which occupied the land of Israel. The term “the great city” is used to describe Nineveh in Jdt 1:1 and frequently in Jonah. Revelation uses the term τῆς πόλεως τῆς μεγάλης, “the great city,” with reference to Babylon (Rev 18:10, 16, 18, 19, 21 cf. 17:18). It is possible that the writer of Judith may have seen Babylon as the inheritor of the title—at least in biblical usage—having conquered Nineveh. However, this does not solve the problem that Nineveh had been extensively de-urbanized and depopulated by the time of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign.

27 Similar arguments can be made for the historical inaccuracies in the introductions to Esther and Daniel. See, for example, Matthias Henze, “The Narrative Frame of Daniel: a Literary Assessment,” *JSJ* 32, no. 1–4 (2001): 5–24. Referring to Marcus’ work on satire, David M. Valeta notes, “Since a satirical text is not necessarily to be understood as literally and historically true, then features such as fantastic events and incongruities become understandable as literary constructions and thus less problematic. Satirical works do not need to be interpreted as factual representations of history.” See Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions: a Satirical Reading of Daniel 1–6*, HBM 12 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2008), 26 n. 86; see also David Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah: Anti-prophetic Satire in the Hebrew Bible*, BJS 301 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1995).

28 Deborah Levine Gera, *Judith*, CEJL (Boston: De Gruyter, 2014), 26.

29 Lawrence M. Wills, “Jewish Novellas in a Greek and Roman Age: Fiction and Identity,” *JSJ* 42, no. 2 (2011): 141–165, 157.

30 The name Αρφαξάδ is undoubtedly a transliteration of אַרְפַּכְשָׁד, a descendant of Shem whose name may have inspired a namesake in Judith. See Gen 10:22; 11:10–13 and 1 Chr 1:17–18.

was, in fact, Cyaxares (c.625–585 BCE), the third of five kings of Media. Through an alliance with Nabopolassar, Cyaxares facilitated the fall of the Neo-Assyrian empire and his daughter married Nebuchadnezzar II, Nabopolassar's son and successor. The alliance between the Median Cyaxares and the Babylonian Nabopolassar against the Assyrians is inverted in *Judith* so that the Median Artaxerxes becomes the enemy of the Assyrian Nebuchadnezzar who went to war against his father-in-law and his father's ally. According to 1:15 Arphaxad was killed by Nebuchadnezzar when, in fact, Cyaxares died after a battle with the Scythians. The absurd distortion of historical facts in *Judith* is ironic as the friend is made to be the enemy. An irony such as this, standing at the commencement of the story, alerts the reader or listener to be *en garde* for further inversions, distortions, and ironies and to question the reality of everything which follows.

The first two words of the book, Ἐτους δωδεκάτου “It was the twelfth year [of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar]” (1:1), are also historically improbable. Nebuchadnezzar's first siege of Jerusalem was in his ninth year (2 Kgs 25:1), while the second siege of the city, led by Nebuchadnezzar's captain Nebuzaradan, was in his nineteenth year (2 Kgs 25:8). *Judith* places these events between the two Babylonian campaigns. The twelfth year of Nebuchadnezzar would have been the fourth year of Zedekiah (cf. Jer 32:1), the last king of Judah before the exile. Yet there is no sign of Zedekiah in this story and Israel was instead ruled by the high priest Joakim and a senate (Jdt 4:8), typical of the Hasmonean period.³¹ To get such important details in Judah's history wrong suggests a deliberateness on the part of the writer rather than making simple mistakes.

These details are so obviously a distortion of history that any contemporary reader or listener would recognize that it was not a telling of history but was rather a fictitious story using the names of well-known historical characters. Torrey makes the point that it would be like telling a story that begins, “It happened at the time when Napoleon Bonaparte was king of England. ...”³² No reader or listener would think the writer had simply made a mistake—the errors are so huge (and there are so many of them) that it would be obvious that they were intentional and designed to mimic the style of historical narrative while serving an entirely different purpose. *Judith*'s ‘confusion’ about the timing of the siege of Jerusalem and the return from exile would be akin

31 Benedikt Otzen says this detail “unambiguously points to the Maccabean and Hasmonean era” as the time of composition. See Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 133.

32 Charles C. Torrey, *The Apocryphal Literature: A Brief Introduction* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1963), 89.

to saying, "Hitler's bombing of London came just a few years after the end of World War II." It would be so wrong that no one would think it was a simple mistake—it would have to have been deliberate, almost comical.

Although Achior's historical outline of the history of Israel opens with the bold claim that "I will tell you the truth about this people ... no falsehood shall come from your servant's mouth" (5:5), its opening statement is ironically false: "these people are descended from the Chaldeans" (5:6). Roitman has pointed out that nowhere in the Bible is Abraham or Israel regarded as being of Chaldean origin and "the descendants of Abraham were regarded at most as relatives (cousins) of the Chaldeans, not as their progeny."³³ He does acknowledge that Achior's claim could be "an exegetical development" based on the reference in Gen 11:28, 31 to Abraham and his family being born in Chaldea and emigrating from "Ur of the Chaldeans." However, following on the heels of Achior's insistence that his historical *précis* is free from error, the failure to distinguish between being born in Chaldea and being descended from Chaldeans led to an inaccurate inference. In any case, perhaps ironically, what Holofernes took from Achior's speech was that Israel "came out of Egypt" (Jdt 6:5) and this serves to highlight the error. An audience familiar with biblical ethnography would detect the error, and therefore possibly suspect the accuracy of what follows. If the initial premise was wrong, even in only some of its details, it would follow that Achior's theological conclusion was also questionable. As an "ironist extraordinaire," the writer skillfully raises a theological explanation for Israel's troubles and simultaneously raises doubts about it.

4 Ironical Humor and Satire in Resistance Literature

Irony *per se* is not necessarily humorous. However, when combined with parody, wordplay, ridicule, and exaggeration, it may contribute to humor, and comic irony is associated with satire.³⁴ *Judith* contains all these literary

33 Adolfo D. Roitman, "'This People are Descendants of Chaldeans' (Judith 5:6): Its Literary Form and Historical Setting," *JBL* 113 (1994): 245–263, 246. See also Roitman, "The Traditions about Abraham's Early Life in the Book of Judith (5:6–9)," in *Things Revealed: Studies in Early Jewish and Christian Literature in Honor of Michael E. Stone*, ed. Esther G. Chazon, David Satran, and Ruth A. Clements (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 73–87.

34 Terms such as "resistance literature" and "theology of resistance" have been used by several scholars, including Anthea E. Portier-Young and Rainer Albertz, with reference to apocalyptic literature and describe literature which encourages resistance to imperial powers or emboldens resisters. While these terms are often applied to apocalyptic literature, Portier-Young also notes the presence of non-apocalyptic theologies of resistance in works such as 1 and 2 Maccabees. See Portier-Young, *Apocalypse Against Empire: Theologies*

devices.³⁵ While satire uses irony as one of its tools, it is dominated by a mixture of ridicule, wit, exaggeration and absurdities, and has a target which is the object of attack, either directly or indirectly.³⁶ Satire, by its very nature, reveals enough about its target so that the intended audience will recognize it, while concealing its identity behind historically recognizable names from the *actual* target should they come upon the satirical work. Rather than seeing themselves on display and therefore judge the work as seditious, they would be more likely to dismiss the work as historically inaccurate and as a reflection of the ignorance of the writers. Ironically, the nature of satire is such that the target is more likely to dismiss the work as naïve or immature than to regard it as a threat.

References in *Judith* to the exile and return (even though such references are anachronistically at odds with the historical setting) place it in the Persian period at the earliest. However, several possible allusions to recognizable Hasmonean-era characters suggest it could be a satirical work which targets

of Resistance in Early Judaism (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 3–11; Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion in the Old Testament Period, Volume 11: From the Exile to the Maccabees* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 564, 594–595. Daniel Valeta argues that the non-apocalyptic court tales of Daniel 1–6 are pre-novelistic Menippean satires that also seek to resist oppressive political forces (Valeta, *Lions and Ovens and Visions*, 1–3). Biblical novellas such as Esther and Judith are arguably of a similar satirical nature and seek to ridicule or undermine imperial power and authority. They may therefore be classified as resistance literature.

- 35 Wordplay seems to be present in many of the names. For example, Wills regards *Judith* as a kind of “erotic fantasy” in which the full might of the Assyrian empire bears down on one otherwise unknown mountain village named “Virginity” (which he regards as the likely meaning of “Bethulia”) whose chastity is defended by one person whose name is “Jewish woman”—Judith, or *Yehudit*, is the feminine form of Judah, *Yehudah*. It should be noted, however, that the book uses the designation יְהוּדִים *Israhēl* “Israelites” rather than “Jews” for its characters. (Wills, “Jewish Novellas,” 153–154). Deborah Gera suggests the name may owe something to Judas Maccabeus and suggests that Judith may be a parallel figure to Judas, “a corrective figure, a counter example to the Hasmonean leaders” (Gera, *Judith*, 255). The only “Judith” in the Hebrew Bible is the Hittite wife of Esau (Gen 26:34). “Bethulia” could be a play on the Hebrew בְּתוּלָה and the imagery of “virgin Israel,” which appears in such places as Jer 31:21 and Amos 5:2. Other possible meanings include “house of God” or “house of ascent.” See Wolfe, *Ruth, Esther, Song of Songs, and Judith*, 200; Moore, *Judith*, 150; Toni Craven, *Artistry and Faith in the Book of Judith*, SBLDS 70 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 73. Otzen posits that as “house of God,” Bethulia is a symbol of Jerusalem (Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 94). James C. VanderKam hypothesizes that the name “Achior” may be a corrupt form of אֲחִיָּהוּד ([my] brother is Judah), which appears in the Septuagint version of Num 34:27 as Αχιωρ *Achior*; see VanderKam, “Achior,” *ABD* 1:1117–1125. For an analysis of humor in *Judith*, see Gruen, *Diaspora Jews*, 158–170.

- 36 Marcus, *From Balaam to Jonah*, 9–10.

either members of the Seleucid dynasty or Hellenistic Jews.³⁷ For example, Judith's defeat of Nebuchadnezzar's general Holofernes may have been modelled on the defeat of Nicanor, a general of the Seleucid king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, whose beheading in 161 BCE is described in 1 Maccabees 7:43–50.³⁸ If so, the writer of *Judith* may have been targeting the Seleucids but using the names Nebuchadnezzar and Assyria as “codenames” for the Seleucid dynasty as “kings of Syria.”³⁹ This certainly would not be unusual for biblical or Jewish literature of the time. The apocryphal book of 4 Ezra and the pseudepigraphic book of 2 Baruch are both set during the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem yet describe the events of the Roman siege of Jerusalem using “Babylonians” as code for “Romans.” The book of Revelation does something similar by using “Babylon” as code for “Rome.” So too the writer of *Judith* may have used “Assyrian” as code for “Syrian” or “Seleucid.”

A feature of this kind of satirical resistance literature is that writers do not directly challenge their overlords or people in authority. The frequency of Hellenisms in the book suggest that the Seleucids are the target, but rather than write about the Seleucid kings who were in control of Judea at the time, it is instead a fictionalized account of an *Assyrian* king who comes against Israel. In a similar manner, while Daniel is set in Babylon, it is evident that the writer's real concern is the *Seleucid* king Antiochus IV Epiphanes, whom he describes using apocalyptic imagery without naming him. Later, the books of 4 Ezra and 2 Baruch will deal with the *Romans*, but their stories are set in Jerusalem during the Babylonian invasion. The pattern tends to be that writers of resistance literature address contemporary concerns by setting their stories in earlier times and in other places to avoid directly identifying their overlords.

37 It was probably written between 135 and 107 BCE in the Hellenistic period, that is, the period after the empire of Alexander the Great was divided into four and Judea became part of the Syrian Seleucid empire, and during the rule of the Hasmonean high priest John Hyrcanus I.

38 Gera, *Judith*, 39, 55.

39 For a discussion of possible events and characters that may have been “skillfully disguised” in *Judith*, see Gabriele Boccaccini, “Tigranes the Great as ‘Nebuchadnezzar’ in the Book of Judith,” in *A Pious Seductress: Studies in the Book of Judith*, ed. Géza G. Xeravits, DCLS 14 (Boston: De Gruyter, 2012), 55–69. For arguments that the book is anti-Hasmonean rather than anti-Seleucid, see Nicolae Roddy, “The Way it Wasn't: The Book of Judith as Anti-Hasmonean Propaganda,” *Studia Hebraica* 8 (2008): 269–277; Benedikt Eckhardt, “Reclaiming Tradition: The Book of Judith and Hasmonean Politics,” *JSP* 18, no. 4 (2009): 243–263.

Philip Davies describes novellas such as Daniel, Esther, Ruth, Jonah, Tobit, and *Judith* as stories written primarily for “serious entertainment.”⁴⁰ While the ironic humor in these texts is certainly entertaining, it is likely that they were intended to serve as subversive resistance literature, ridiculing the enemy while entertaining one’s allies. It draws on the favorite literary tools of the satirist—irony, exaggeration, humor, and parody—and skillfully works them into a powerful and entertaining drama. As resistance literature, *Judith* ridicules the political leadership as well as undermining the theology of those who called on the nation to accept their lot as the result of their own or intergenerational sin rather than to oppose tyranny.

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40 Philip R. Davies, *Scribes and Schools: The Canonization of Hebrew Scriptures*, LAI (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 142–151. For a discussion of whether the genre of *Judith* is a novel or a short story, see Otzen, *Tobit and Judith*, 124–131.

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Ironie und Ambiguität im Buch der Weisheit

Luca Mazzinghi

1 Ironie erkennen: eine schwierige Aufgabe¹

Den Begriff der Ironie zu definieren ist, wie wir wissen, keine leichte Aufgabe.² Ganz allgemein können wir festhalten, dass die Ironie auf der literarischen Ebene immer eine verborgene Bedeutung freisetzt,³ die über den offensichtlichen Sinn des Textes hinausgeht und oftmals eine Form von Kritik enthält. Die Ironie ist daher „ein kreatives Werk, das *auf andere Weise* spricht in dem Sinne, als es eine *andere* Wirklichkeit aufzeigt, und zugleich dekonstruiert, ohne notwendigerweise auf geordnete Weise zu konstruieren.“⁴

Es ist nicht möglich, hier im Detail auf die alten und neuen linguistischen und hermeneutischen Theorien zur Ironie einzugehen.⁵ Was das Buch der Weisheit betrifft, scheint es interessanter zu sein, auf das Ironieverständnis der klassischen Rhetorik zurückzugreifen, sei es als Wort- oder als Gedankenfigur; unter dieser Perspektive ist die Ironie ein „Zuviel“ (*tropos*), d.h. eine

1 Vortrag im Rahmen der Konferenz „Wahrhaftig, mit euch stirbt die Weisheit“ (Ijob 12,2), Ironie und Ambiguität in den Büchern Kohelet und Ijob; Universität Wien, 2./3. Juli 2020 (Übersetzung durch T. Häner und H. Engel).

2 Vgl. unter den vielen möglichen Definitionen die von Carolyn Sharp vorgeschlagene: „Irony is a performance of misdirection that generates aporetic interactions between an unreliable ‚said‘ and a truer ‚unsaid‘ so as to persuade us of something that is subtler, more complex, or more profound than the apparent meaning. Irony disrupts cultural assumptions about the narrative coherence that seems to ground tropological and epistemological transactions, inviting us into an experience of alterity that moves us toward new insight by problematizing false understandings“; Carolyn J. Sharp, *Irony and Meaning in the Hebrew Bible*, ISBL (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 24.

3 Vgl. Hannele Kohvakka, *Ironie und Text. Zur Ergründung von Ironie auf der Ebene des sprachlichen Textes* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang), 1997, 13.

4 Sandro Gaburro, *L'ironia, „voce di sottile silenzio“* (San Paolo: Cinisello Balsamo [M1], 2013), 10; ursprüngliche Betonung. Diese Definition passt auch zur Verwendung der Ironie in der klassischen Rhetorik: „Irony is the use of words which in the context convey a contrary meaning“; Galen O. Rowe, „Style“, in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.–A.D. 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 128.

5 Vgl. etwa das grundlegende Werk von Wayne C. Booth, *A Rhetoric of Irony* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974); vgl. auch Linda Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge. The Theory and Politics of Irony* (London: Routledge, 1994); Uwe Japp, *Theorie der Ironie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1983).

Ersetzung eines Wortes oder einer Phrase mit dem Ziel, einen bestimmten Effekt zu bewirken („*Tropos est verbi vel sermonis a propria significatione in aliam cum virtute mutatio*“; vgl. Quintilian, *Inst.* 8,6,1). Wenn die Veränderung nicht nur ein einziges Wort oder einen Ausdruck, sondern eine ganze Gruppe von Wörtern betrifft, handelt es sich um eine Figur (*figura*) oder ein Schema.

In der klassischen Rhetorik setzt die Ironie immer eine gewisse Form von Dissimulation voraus,⁶ sei es im negativen Sinn (im Verbergen der eigenen Ansichten), sei es im positiven Sinn, d.h. im Vorgeben, der Meinung des Gegners zuzustimmen (vgl. Quintilian, *Inst.* 6,3,84–85).⁷ Die Ironie wird oft verwendet, um das Denken oder die Handlungsweisen der einzelnen Person oder Personengruppe, die man kritisieren will, offenzulegen, um deren Absurdität aufzuzeigen; in diesem Sinne wird die Ironie oft in juridischem Kontext verwendet. Indes ist die Ironie nicht einfach eine rhetorische Technik, die eingesetzt wird, um den Gegner schlechtzumachen und die eigene Position zu stärken. Die wohlbekannte sokratische Ironie verweist vielmehr auf die Haltung dessen, der Arroganz und Hochmut zurückweist, um dem Gegenüber dessen eigene Begrenztheit bewusst zu machen.

Die klassische Rhetorik kennt bereits die Unterscheidung zwischen Ironie und Sarkasmus, obschon Letzterer oft als eine Form von Ironie verstanden wird.⁸ Während aber der Sarkasmus vor allem darauf zielt, zu zerstören und den Gegner zu vernichten, erwächst die Ironie aus dem Anliegen, zu verbessern, wenn auch mittels der Kritik. Die Ironie ist auch zu unterscheiden von der Parodie und der Satire, die oft die Technik der Übertreibung verwenden, um den Gegner lächerlich zu machen: Die Parodie produziert – wie der Sarkasmus – immer ein Opfer. Die Ironie dagegen will eine neue Bedeutung hervorbringen und beruht oft auf einem echten Suchen nach Wahrheit.⁹ Die Ironie entspringt auch einer gewissen „Inkongruenz“ zwischen dem, was ist, und dem, was sein sollte; von daher enthält sie ein Element des Protests; wer sich der Ironie bedient, lässt weiten Spielraum für den Interpreten, der

6 „Zu der Art von Allegorie aber, in der das Gegenteil ausgedrückt ist, gehört die Ironie. Die Römer nennen sie ‚*illusio*‘ (Verspottung). Diese erkennt man entweder am Ton, in dem sie gesprochen wird, oder an der betreffenden Person oder am Wesen der Sache („*contraria ostenduntur ... quae aut pronuntiatione intellegitur, aut persona aut rei natura*“), Quintilian, *Inst.* 8,6,54. Cicero spricht von der „*dissimulatio*“ (*De or.* II, 67).

7 Zur Ironie in der klassischen Rhetorik vgl. David E. Orton and Dean R. Anderson, eds., *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric. A Foundation for Literary Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 246–247; 403–407; 689–691 und die dort angegebene Literatur.

8 Vgl. Orton and Anderson, eds., *Handbook*, 689.

9 Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond Press), 1981, 26–28. Die Ironie ist ein spontaner Protest der Wahrheit; vgl. Vladimir Jankelevitch, *La musique et les heures* (Paris: Seuil, 1988), 96.

die wirkliche Bedeutung, die sich in der Ironie verbirgt, selbst konstruieren muss. Daher birgt die Ironie immer ein gewisses Risiko des Missverständnisses mit sich, denn vieles bleibt der Interpretation oder der Intelligenz des Lesers überlassen.¹⁰

Es ist allerdings anzumerken, dass das Verständnis von Ironie als „Antiphrasis“ zu eng ist, da es sich auf die lexikalische Ebene beschränkt. Es gibt aber auch eine erweiterte Form der Ironie, die aus der Zitation von etwas Gesagtem in einem Kontext entsteht, der sich von dem ursprünglichen unterscheidet, wodurch im neuen Kontext eine ironische Wirkung entsteht.¹¹ Dies ist – um im Bereich der biblischen Weisheitsliteratur zu bleiben – beim bekannten Zitat/der Parodie von Ps 8 in Ijob 7,17–19 der Fall. Um diesen Typus der Ironie zu erkennen, ist es zunächst notwendig, die wörtliche Bedeutung des Textes zu verwerfen aufgrund der offensichtlichen Unmöglichkeit des Verständnisses, und dann folglich – als einzig mögliche – eine ironische Interpretation zu wählen.¹² „Das Verfahren, eine Ironie als solche zu erkennen, folgt gewissermaßen rückwärts dem poetischen Prozess, der sie geschaffen hat, indem es jene typische Dialektik von Verhüllen/Enthüllen auslöst, die eine Lektüre in zwei Schritten gestattet, ja sogar dazu nötigt: eine erste wörtliche, die auszuschließen oder zu ergänzen oder zu übersteigen ist, da sie sich als unzulänglich erweist, und eine zweite ironische, die vermutlich angemessener ist.“¹³ Im Übrigen kannte schon die klassische Rhetorik präzise Anzeichen von Ironie, die der Verfasser absichtlich in den Text gesetzt hatte oder die er erst in seinen mündlichen Vortrag einfügte, angefangen vom Tonfall.¹⁴

Was die Ambiguität betrifft, lässt sich diese als eine gewisse Unbestimmtheit definieren hinsichtlich der Bedeutung eines Wortes oder eines Satzes oder jeder Äußerung, die sich auf ein kommunikatives Handeln bezieht; diese Unbestimmtheit kann vom Autor intendiert sein oder nicht und setzt in jedem Fall die Mitwirkung des Lesers voraus, um erfasst zu werden.¹⁵ Bereits die klassische Rhetorik kennt den Gebrauch der *ambiguitas* / *amphibolia*, im

10 Good, *Irony*, 30–33.

11 Zu diesem Verständnis von Ironie vgl. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, „Les ironies comme mentions“, *Poétiques* 36 (1978), 409.

12 Vgl. ausführlich die vier Kriterien, die vorgeschlagen werden von Booth, *Irony*, 10–14.

13 Roberto Vignolo, „La poetica ironica del Qohelet. Contributo allo sviluppo di un orientamento critico“, *Teologia* 25 (2000), 227. Der ganze Artikel ist grundlegend und unverzichtbar für das Studium der Ironie in einem weisheitlichen Text.

14 Vgl. Orton and Anderson, eds., *Handbook*, 789.

15 Zum Problem der Ambiguität vgl. die ausführliche Erörterung in Doug Ingram, *Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 1–43; vgl. auch Wolfgang Iser, „Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response“, in *Aspects of Narrative: Selected Papers from the English Institute*, ed. John Hillis Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 2–45.

Besonderen jenes Typus‘ der Ambiguität, der mit einer möglichen Doppeldeutigkeit eines Worts verbunden ist („*non quia excludenda sint omnino verba duos sensos significantia*“; vgl. Quintilian, *Inst.* 6,3, 48).¹⁶

Die Ironie, die ihrem Wesen nach polysem ist, bedient sich oft eines gewissen Grades an Ambiguität. „Als ehrliche Betrügerin löscht die Ironie die Sprache nicht aus, sondern beruht auf ihr und teilt ihre Ambiguität. ... Als eine Form indirekter Kommunikation weist die Ironie nicht eine Entsprechung auf zwischen der wörtlichen Form des Gesagten und der illokutionären Intention, vielmehr ist gemäß der Idee des Sprechenden diese Intention offensichtlich und notwendigerweise *verdeckt*.“¹⁷

2 Die Ambiguität des Todes im Buch der Weisheit: Zwischen Schein und Wirklichkeit

Einer der ersten großen neuzeitlichen Kommentatoren des Buchs der Weisheit, Friedrich Focke, schrieb bereits 1913, der Verfasser des Buchs sei in Bezug auf seinen Sprachgebrauch „genial zu nennen“.¹⁸ Dennoch gibt es bis heute keine eingehenden und vertieften Studien zum Stil und der Rhetorik des Buches.¹⁹ Die Arbeit von Alexis Léonas (veröffentlicht 2011) hat aufgezeigt, wie das Buch der Weisheit einerseits die Sprache der LXX imitiert und andererseits typische Elemente der griechischen Rhetorik aufgreift und so einen eigenen Weg zu gehen versucht.²⁰ Der Verfasser der Weisheit verwendet ein weites Repertoire an rhetorischen Figuren;²¹ zu diesen zählt zweifellos die Ironie, um die es hier gehen soll, zusammen mit dem Thema der Ambiguität.

16 Zur *ambiguitas* / *amphibolia* in der klassischen Rhetorik vgl. Orton and Anderson, eds., *Handbook*, 96–97; 466–467.

17 Gaburro, *Ironia*, 193.

18 „Es ist klar, dass wir hier eine hervorragende, ganz individuelle Begabung vor uns haben, die man wegen der sicheren und gewandten Beherrschung des sprachlichen Materials versucht ist genial zu nennen“; Friedrich Focke, *Die Entstehung der Weisheit Salomos* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1913), 62.

19 Vgl. die Pionierarbeit von James M. Reese, *Hellenistic Influence on the Book of Wisdom and Its Consequences* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1970).

20 Alexis Léonas, „The Poetics of Wisdom. Language and Style in the Book of Wisdom“, in *Et sapienter et eloquenter. Studies on Rhetorical and Stylistic Features of the Septuagint*, ed. Eberhard Bons and Thomas J. Kraus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

21 Vgl. Luca Mazzinghi, *Weisheit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2018), 25–26; Vgl. auch ders., „The Style of the Book of Wisdom“, in *Die Sprache der Septuaginta / The Language of the Septuagint*, ed. Eberhard Bons and Jan Joosten (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlag, 2016), 386–392.

Die Ambiguität ist ein Aspekt der Rhetorik des Buchs der Weisheit, der in der Studie von Michael Kolarcik, *The Ambiguity of Death in the Book of Wisdom* (1991), ausführlich untersucht wurde. Kolarcik hat eingehend aufgezeigt, dass die Vorstellung des „Todes“, die im ersten Teil des Buches – vor allem in Weish 1–3 – enthalten ist, ambig ist – oder besser: Das Wort θάνατος, das im Buch mehrmals verwendet wird, ist selbst ambig. An dieser Stelle beschränke ich mich darauf, einige grundlegenden Aspekte zu erwähnen.

Von welchem Tod spricht der Verfasser, wenn er in Weish 1,14 festhält: „Gott hat den Tod nicht erschaffen“? Auf den ersten Blick scheint es, dass der physische Tod gemeint sei, doch in 1,16 spricht der Text nur von den Gottlosen als jenen, die sich den Tod zuziehen durch das Werk ihrer Hände. In 3,2 dagegen heißt es in Bezug auf den Tod der Gerechten, „es schien, dass sie gestorben waren“.

Der physische Tod selbst ist also im Buch der Weisheit in sich ambig; für die Gerechten stellt er nämlich einen Durchgang zum Leben mit Gott dar („sie sind im Frieden“: vgl. 3,3); für die Gottlosen dagegen weist er voraus auf den endgültigen Tod, ihr Verweilen im Hades (vgl. Weish 17,14, wo der Hades schon unsere „Hölle“ ist²²).

Das Buch der Weisheit verwendet folglich das Mittel der Ambiguität, um seine Darlegungen zum Tod zur Entfaltung zu bringen. Der physische Tod wird gesucht, ja sogar geliebt von den Gottlosen, die – von 1,16 her gesehen – „der Partei des Todes“ angehören; der Verfasser bezieht sich hier auf eine Vereinigung von Genussmenschen, die im ägyptischen Alexandrien tatsächlich existierte.²³ Zugleich aber führt das Streben nach dem Tod dazu, dass die Gottlosen ihrem endgültigen Untergang entgegengehen (vgl. etwa 4,19 und das ganze Kap. 5). Für die Gerechten dagegen ist der physische Tod nur scheinbar; des Geschick der Gerechten ist nämlich die ἀφθαρσία, die „Unverderblichkeit“, auf die hin der Mensch geschaffen wurde (vgl. 2,23).

Es ist auch der Abschnitt Weish 3,1–9 zu erwähnen, der vom endgültigen Geschick der Gerechten handelt und der auf raffinierte Weise mit den Kategorien Schein und Wirklichkeit spielt; was in den Augen der „Toren“ als

22 Cf. Luca Mazzinghi, „Non c'è regno dell'Ade sulla terra'. L'inferno alla luce di alcuni testi del libro della Sapienza“, *Vivens Homo* 6 (1995): 229–256. Weish 17,14 enthält sicherlich eine ironische Formulierung: Die „in Wirklichkeit machtlose Nacht“ sei „aus den Höhlen eines machtlosen Hades“ über sie gekommen. Die vorgebliche Macht der Zauberer (vgl. Weish 17,7–10) steht im Widerspruch zu ihrer Machtlosigkeit, einen Tod, der an sich machtlos ist, zu besiegen.

23 Vgl. Chrysostome Larcher, *Etudes sur le livre de la Sagesse* (Paris: Gabalda, 1969), 289; Françoise M. Baslez, „The Author of Wisdom and the Cultured Environment of Alexandria“, in *The Book of Wisdom in Modern Research. Studies on Tradition, Redaction, Theology*, ed. Giuseppe Bellia and Angelo Passaro (Berlin: De Gruyter 2005), 40–41.

„Tod“ erscheint, ist in Wirklichkeit, mit den Augen der Gerechten betrachtet, Leben mit Gott. Die Ambiguität des Todes erwächst also für den Verfasser des Buchs der Weisheit aus einer falschen Auffassung der Wirklichkeit und aus dem fehlenden Verständnis für die tiefste Wahrheit der Sachverhalte: dass der physische Tod für die einen Untergang, für die anderen dagegen Rettung bedeutet.

3 Elemente der Ironie im Buch der Weisheit: die Rede der Gottlosen (Weish 2,1–20)

Im Buch der Weisheit konzentriert sich die Ironie, die – wie wir sehen werden – zuweilen in Sarkasmus oder offene Satire mündet, vor allem auf zwei Bereiche im Buch: auf die Rede der Gottlosen, denen der Verfasser in Weish 2,1–20 das Wort gibt, sowie auf die ausgiebige Kritik der Idolatrie, die in Weish 13–15 enthalten ist und auf die wir näher eingehen wollen.

Zweifellos gibt es im Buch der Weisheit noch andere Abschnitte, die unter dem Aspekt der Ironie untersucht werden könnten. Im Besonderen ist an die Kritik an den Zaubernern in Weish 17,7–10 zu denken, die nicht nur auf die Zauberer im Buch Exodus zielt, sondern vor allem die, die der Verfasser im hellenistischen Ägypten antreffen konnte. In diesen Versen ist der ironische Ton unverkennbar und kehrt im weiteren Verlauf des Kapitels wieder, vgl. Weish 17,14 (s. Fußnote 22) und die ironische Parodie auf den klassischen literarischen *topos* der *loci amoeni* in Weish 17,17–19; mittels dieser Technik hebt der Verfasser die Angst hervor, in die die Ägypter fallen, die in Wirklichkeit für die Gottlosen des Kap. 2 stehen, dem wir uns nunmehr zuwenden.

In der Rede der Gottlosen in Weish 2,1–20 zeigt sich die Ironie aus meiner Sicht auf zweifacher Ebene. Zunächst legt der Autor des Buches den Gottlosen einige Aussagen über den „Gerechten“ in den Mund, die im zweiten Teil der Rede (2,10–20) in einen regelrechten beißenden Sarkasmus übergehen. Die Gottlosen sind in diesem Abschnitt Juden, die sich im Namen von äußerst üblen Aspekten der hellenistischen Kultur vom Judentum abgewendet oder jedenfalls von den jüdischen Bräuchen gelöst haben; der „Gerechte“ dagegen ist der Jude, der dem „Gesetz“ und seiner Erziehung treu geblieben ist (vgl. 2,12). Die Gottlosen trachten danach, mit Worten und Taten die Haltlosigkeit der Überzeugungen des Gerechten aufzuzeigen, der Gott als Vater betrachtet und auf ein Leben jenseits des Todes hofft: „Wir wollen sehen, ob seine Worte wahr sind ... verurteilen wir ihn zu einem ehrlosen Tod ...“ (2,17–20).

Die sarkastische Ironie der Gottlosen gegenüber dem „Gerechten“ wird in der Hand des Verfassers zu einem wirksamen Mittel, um deren Intention bei der Wiedergabe ihrer Worte umzustülpen. Es handelt sich um eine Ironie,

die auf mehreren Voraussetzungen aufruht: dass die Gottlosen, als mögliche Adressaten des Buches, selber Juden sind und dass die Leser vollauf fähig sind, die Anspielungen des Verfassers auf verschiedene Bibeltexte zu erkennen, die den Gottlosen auf schlaue Weise in den Mund gelegt werden. Es handelt sich um einen typischen Aspekt der Ironie: Dem Leser wird die Aufgabe und Mühe überlassen, eine verborgene Bedeutung aufgrund von mehr oder weniger stark verdeckten Anspielungen auf andere Texte aufzuspüren.²⁴

Ein Beispiel mag hier genügen: In Weish 2,9 – am Ende des zweiten Abschnittes der Rede (2,6–9), der eine Einladung enthält, das Leben zu genießen – sagen die Gottlosen: „Das ist unser Anteil, das ist unser Erbe“. Zusammen mit dem Wort *μερίς*, das Weish 1,16–2,24 rahmt, finden wir hier *κληρος*, ein Wort, das in der LXX einen klaren theologischen Hintergrund hat, wie z.B. in Jer 13,25^{LXX} und Jes 57,6^{LXX} (hier zusammen mit *μερίς*, „Anteil“) sichtbar wird; im deuteronomischen Sprachgebrauch bezeichnet *κληρος* („Erbe“) das verheißene Land als Teil des Erbes, das dem Volk Israel zukommt; das Wort findet sich in dieser Bedeutung mehrmals in Dtn und Jos.²⁵ Im Anschluss an Ps 15,5^{LXX} (*κύριος ἡ μερίς τῆς κληρονομίας μου*: „Der Herr ist der Anteil meines Erbes“) will der Verfasser der Weisheit (auf ironische Weise) erkennbar machen, wie die Gottlosen auf blasphemische Weise die biblische Sprache verdrehen; ihr „Anteil“ und ihr „Erbe“ ist nach ihrer Ansicht etwas ganz anderes als jener „Anteil“ und jenes „Erbe“, das Gott denen verheißt, die ihm treu sind; vielmehr versuchen sie, das Leben zu genießen ohne Einschränkungen – eine Haltung, die aber unausweichlich in den Tod mündet.²⁶

Indem das Buch der Weisheit die Rede der Gottlosen wiedergibt, zeigt es uns ein Spiel mit einer doppelten Ironie: die Gottlosen, die den Gerechten ironisieren und ihn beseitigen wollen, werden selbst zum Objekt der Ironie des Verfassers. Um aber diese zweite Ebene der Ironie zu erfassen, ist es notwendig, die Anspielungen auf verschiedene biblische Texte zu erkennen, die vom Verfasser in einem anderen Kontext als dem ursprünglichen verwendet werden.

24 Vgl. Good, *Irony*, 31–33; vgl. auch oben Kap. 1.

25 Vgl. z.B. Dtn 2,5.9.19; 5,31; 12,1; Jos 11,7; 12,6 usw.

26 Zu einem Kommentar über die Rede der Gottlosen und zu deren biblischem Hintergrund vgl. Mazzinghi, *Weisheit*, 77–96.

4 Die Ironie in der Kritik am Götzendienst (Weish 13–15)

Kaum untersucht wurde dagegen bisher die Ironie in dem umfangreichen Teil über die Kritik am Götzendienst (Weish 13–15). Beim Durchgang durch diese Kapitel finden wir eine breite Auswahl an Passagen, in denen der Verfasser des Buches gegenüber den Götzendienern zur Waffe der Ironie greift, die nicht selten an den Sarkasmus oder gar an die Satire grenzt. Der Verfasser will damit die Adressaten des Buches – die gebildeten Juden Alexandriens – vor der Gefahr des Götzendienstes warnen, von dem das religiöse und kulturelle Umfeld, in dem sie leben, stark geprägt ist.

4.1 *Weish 13,10–19*

Der Abschnitt Weish 13,10–19 enthält, nach dem positiver gestimmten Abschnitt über die Philosophen (13,1–9) eine erste ausdrückliche Kritik am Götzendienst. In 13,10–19 wird die Entstehung des Götzenbilds beschrieben, das als ein von Menschenhand gemachter Gegenstand präsentiert wird. Die Kritik beginnt in V. 10 mit der Feststellung, dass das Götzenbild oft aus einem „wertlosen Stein, Werk altertümlicher Hand“ (χρειρὸς ἀρχαίος) hergestellt wird. Das Adjektiv ἀρχαίος hat, wie sich bei der Verwendung in Weish 8,8 zeigt, zweifellos die Bedeutung „alt“. In unserem Fall kann der Verweis auf die „alten Steine“ als Hinweis gelten auf heilige Steine, die seit alter Zeit verehrt werden.²⁷ Ich halte es aber für wahrscheinlicher, dass hier ἀρχαίος die Bedeutung „antiquiert/veraltet“ hat; das Götzenbild ist zweifellos ein „antiker Stein“, aber in Wirklichkeit ist dieser Stein alt, antiquiert, überholt, und hat also keinerlei Wert. Die griechische Sprache kennt diesen abwertenden Sprachgebrauch von ἀρχαίος;²⁸ es wäre hier ein einzigartiger Fall in der LXX, wo das Adjektiv sonst in der gewöhnlicheren Bedeutung „alt(ehrwürdig) / antik“ verwendet wird. Ich halte es also für möglich, dass es sich hier um eine verbale Ironie handelt, die mit der Zweideutigkeit von ἀρχαίος – „alt“ oder „veraltet“ – spielt. Die Götzendiener meinen, sie würden sich auf antike, verehrungswürdige Traditionen stützen, doch in Wirklichkeit handelt es gemäß unserem Verfasser um „veraltete“, antiquierte, überholte Traditionen, die keiner Verehrung würdig sind.

Im gleichen Abschnitt (Weish 13,10–19) erwähnt V. 13 den Holzhandwerker, der ein Götzenbild schuf „als Feierabendsbeschäftigung“ und es „der

27 Vgl. Chrysostome Larcher, *Sagesse de Salomon ou Livre de la Sagesse*, III (Paris: Gabalda, 1984), 776.

28 Vgl. Francisco Adrados und Juan Somolinos, eds., *Diccionario Griego-Español* (online Version: <http://dge.cchs.csic.es>), sub voce; vgl. z.B. Platon, *Leg.*, 797c; Aristoteles, *Probl.*, 317.

Gestalt eines Menschen nachbildete“. Das Götzenbild entsteht folglich aus den Arbeitsabfällen eines Handwerkers (vgl. die bewusste Wiederholung des Wortes ἀπόβλημα, „Abfall“, in V. 13a), Abfälle, die Verwendung finden in freien Momenten eines Holzhandwerkers, der gerade nichts Besseres zu tun hat, wie in V. 13d unterstrichen wird: ἐμπειρία ἀνέσεως, d.h. „mit der Erfahrung der freien Zeit“. Der ironische Ton ist hier evident; wir haben es zweifellos mit einer scharfen Ironie zu tun, die an beißenden Sarkasmus grenzt.

Im selben Abschnitt lesen wir auch, dass der Holzhandwerker dem Götzenbild das Bild (εἰκών) eines Menschen gibt; der Text spielt sehr wahrscheinlich auf Jes 44,13 an (ἐποίησεν αὐτὸ ὡς μορφήν ἀνδρός; „er hat es gemacht wie die Figurer eines Mannes“), doch die Verwendung des Wortes könnte eine bewusste und polemische Bezugnahme auf den Begriff in Gen 1,26 darstellen: der Mensch, der nach dem Bild (κατ' εἰκόνα) Gottes geschaffen wurde, wird durch ein Götzenbild ersetzt, das von einem Menschen gemacht wurde, der glaubt, damit einen Gott nach seinem Bild zu erschaffen; der Götzendienst erscheint damit als eine Art von Anti-Schöpfung, als eine bewusste Negation (εἰδῶς, „im Wissen“, Weish 13,16b) der Absicht Gottes für die Welt.

In 13,14a wird die Möglichkeit erwähnt, dass das Götzenbild einem abscheuerregenden Tier gleichen kann, was die nachfolgende Kritik am ägyptischen Tierkult (15,14–19) antizipiert; die Verwendung des Verbs ὁμοίωσεν, „ähnlich machen“, verstärkt den Eindruck, dass hier ein ironischer Bezug zu Genesis intendiert ist (vgl. καθ' ὁμοίωσιν, „nach der Ähnlichkeit“, in Gen 1,26; vgl. zudem Jes 40,18 und Dtn 4,15–17).

In diesem Fall ist die Ironie zweifellos subtiler, und sie zu erkennen setzt auf Seiten des Lesers eine sehr gute Kenntnis des Genesis-Textes voraus, auf den sich die Argumentation des Verfassers weitgehend stützt. Dies alles bestätigt den Eindruck, dass es sich bei den Adressaten des Buches der Weisheit zweifellos um schriftkundige Juden handelt, die imstande sind, solche Formen von Anspielungen zu erkennen. Die Ironie des Autors in Bezug auf den götzendienerischen Handwerker erwächst aus der Überzeugung, dass der Götzendienst eine Verdrehung des Sinns der Schöpfung darstellt. Es handelt sich um eine der wichtigsten Grundlagen der Ironie als rhetorisches Mittel, dass sie als Kritik an einer falschen Wahrnehmung eines Sachverhalts dient und damit als veritative Instanz, die in diesem Fall auf dem Vertrauen gründet, das der Verfasser der Weisheit gegenüber seiner Sicht der Welt als Schöpfungswerk eines personalen Gottes hegt.

Das gleiche ironische Spiel können wir erneut in Weish 15,16f beobachten, im Kontext der Kritik am ägyptischen Tierkult, die den ganzen Buchteil Weish 13–15 beschließt:

- 15,16 Ein Mensch hat sie [die Götzenbilder] nämlich gemacht,
einer, der den Geist (nur als Darlehen) geborgt hat, hat sie
geformt;
kein Mensch vermag nämlich etwas ihm Gleiches zu einem
Gott zu formen;
15,17 da er aber sterblich ist, bewirkt er (nur) Totes mit gesetzlosen
Händen;
er ist nämlich besser als seine Kultgegenstände:
er hat ja Leben erhalten, jene aber niemals.

Die Kritik richtet sich hier gegen den Menschen, der sich zum Schöpfer aufspielt, indem er sich einen Gott nach seinem Bild schafft, während er doch selbst Bild des wahren Gottes ist; auch der Text von Weish 15,16 greift auf ironische Weise auf Gen 1,27 und 2,7 zurück. Während in 15,8 ψυχὴ verwendet wird, gebraucht V. 16 dagegen πνεῦμα; die beiden Wörter werden synonym verwendet und bezeichnen in beiden Fällen die „Seele“, die biblisch als das Leben verstanden wird, das Gott dem Menschen verliehen hat (δεδαινεῖσμένος).

Kehren wir zum Abschnitt Weish 13,10–19 zurück, wo die Kritik am Götzendienst nochmals einen ironischen Ton anschlägt; so lesen wir in V. 16:

- 13,16 So traf er [der Handwerker] also, damit es [das Götzenbild]
nicht herunterfiel,
/ Fürsorge für es
im Wissen, dass es unfähig ist, sich selbst zu helfen:
Es ist nämlich nur ein Bild und benötigt Hilfe!

Das Götzenbild, so der Verfasser der Weisheit, ist ein toter Gegenstand; es kann sich selbst nicht helfen. Wenn der Handwerker nicht Fürsorge trifft, fällt die Statue zu Boden. Der griechische Text verwendet hier das Verb προνοέω, „fürsorgen“, das unvermittelt an πρόνοια erinnert, die göttliche „Vorsehung“, von der im positiven Sinne Weish 14,3 handelt. Auf einer ersten Ebene ist der Text zweifellos eher sarkastisch als ironisch; das Götzenbild ist nichts wert, es ist nämlich nicht imstande, sich selbst aufrecht zu halten! Zugleich allerdings erzeugt die Anspielung auf die „Vorsehung“ eine subtile Ironie in der Wahrnehmung des jüdischen Lesers, dessen Gedanken zu dem großen Thema der göttlichen Vorsehung wandern;²⁹ dagegen muss der Götzendiener gegenüber

29 Es ist allerdings anzumerken, dass die πρόνοια in der LXX einen relativ unbedeutenden Begriff darstellt, der im Buch der Weisheit sehr wahrscheinlich aus der stoischen Philosophie entliehen wird.

dem Götzenbild, das er sich gemacht hat, selbst eine solche „Vorsehung“ walten lassen, um zu verhindern, dass dieses beschädigt wird.

In V. 16 wird auch angemerkt, dass das Götzenbild nur ein Bild, εἰκὼν, sei – ein Begriff, der an sich nicht pejorativ ist und auch in Weish 7,26c verwendet wird, um die Weisheit selbst zu beschreiben, und dem wir bereits in V. 13 begegnet sind; daher benötigt das Götzenbild Hilfe. Es ist allerdings zu beachten, dass in einigen Texten der LXX εἰκὼν als Begriff ausreicht, um das Götzenbild zu bezeichnen (Dtn 4,16; 2 Kön 11,18; Jes 40,19.20 usw.); er ist daher nicht notwendigerweise ironisch zu verstehen; der Kontext scheint mir aber hier entscheidend auf ein ironisches Verständnis hinzudeuten.

Der Gebrauch des Wortes βοήθεια, „Hilfe“, ist zweifellos ironisch; im Griechischen der LXX findet diese Begrifflichkeit nämlich vor allem in Psalmtexten Verwendung, in denen Menschen von Gott Hilfe erbitten (vgl. Ps 59,13; 69,2; 70,12 u.a.); das Götzenbild dagegen kann sich selbst nicht helfen. Es handelt sich hier also um eine Stelle, wo der ironische Sinn sich aus dem Vergleich mit ähnlichen Texten ergibt, wobei aber ein veränderter Kontext festzustellen ist.

Es erscheint nützlich darauf hinzuweisen in Hinsicht auf diese Texte der Weisheit, dass eine ähnliche Kritik an den Götzenbildern auch in der griechisch-römischen Welt anzutreffen ist; man denke etwa an die berühmte Satire des Horaz gegen das *inutile lignum* (Sat. 1,8,1–3), das von vielen Kommentatoren der Weisheit zitiert wird und wo das Götzenbild polemisch und ironisch als Werk eines Handwerkers beschrieben wird, der seine Zeit für nichts Besseres zu einzusetzen versteht als zur Herstellung eines unbrauchbaren Holzstücks. Die Ironie in Weish 13,10–19, die an eigentlichen Sarkasmus grenzt, zeigt die Absicht des Verfassers, die Idolatrie lächerlich zu machen und deren Falschheit aufzuweisen; die Kraft der Polemik der Weisheit erlaubt es allerdings dem Verfasser nicht, tiefer auf die Vorstellungen und den Glauben der Götzendiener einzugehen. So waren etwa die ägyptischen Rituale zweifellos komplexer, als der Verfasser sie darstellt. Seine sarkastische Ironie ist indes hier auf den Glauben an den Gott Israels ausgerichtet, den er verteidigen und fördern will; sein Ziel ist es—aus der Perspektive des gläubigen Juden—die völlige Nutzlosigkeit des Götzenbildes im Gegensatz zum Gott Israels, der als Einziger retten kann, aufzuzeigen.

4.2 14,1–10 „Holz“

Der Abschnitt Weish 14,1–10 geht von dem in Alexandria bekannten Brauch aus, vor dem Antritt einer Seefahrt eine Statue auf dem Bug des Schiffes anzubringen. Der Abschnitt zeigt, über den offensichtlichen biblischen Hintergrund,

die Arche Noachs, hinaus polemische Bezugnahmen auf die Isis Pelagia, die alexandrinische Patronin der Seefahrer.³⁰

An dieser Stelle beschränke ich mich darauf, die dreimalige Verwendung des Wortes ξύλον „Holz“ (Weish 14,1.5.7) hervorzuheben. Das Wort kam schon in 13,13 (ξύλον σκολιόν, „krummes Holz“) vor, um die Herstellung des Götzenbildes zu beschreiben, und bezeichnete einfach ein Stück Holz. In der gleichen Bedeutung kehrt ξύλον in 14,1b wieder: Bevor er die Seereise antritt, ruft der Seefahrer ein Stück Holz (d.h. wiederum: das Götzenbild) an, das sich in morscherem Zustand befindet als das Schiff, mit dem er fährt; er verrichtet also ein nutzloses Gebet. In 14,5b bezeichnet ξύλον das Fahrzeug selbst; mit Hilfe der Vorsehung Gottes vertrauen die Menschen ihr Leben einem „ganz unbedeutenden Holz“ an, werden aber gerettet. Weish 14,6 zeigt, dass der Verfasser des Buches der Weisheit hier an die Arche Noachs denkt; so kommt es zur letzten Erwähnung des „Holzes“ in 14,7: „Gesegnet ist das Holz, durch das Gerechtigkeit geschieht.“

Der Text bewegt sich auch in diesem Fall zwischen einem klaren Sarkasmus (das Götzenbild ist nichts anderes als ein nutzloses Stück Holz) und einer sicherlich feineren Ironie: Auch das Holz, in diesem Falle das Schiff, kann ein Werkzeug der Rettung sein – aber nur durch das Wirken Gottes.

4.3 14,22 *Frieden und Krieg*

In der Mitte der Kritik am Götzendienst findet sich der Abschnitt Weish 14,11–31; in V. 22–26 bietet der Verfasser des Buches eine Liste von 22 beispielhaften Lastern, als deren Ursprung der Götzendienst betrachtet wird. V. 22bc leitet diese Liste ein, indem in Erinnerung gerufen wird, dass die fehlende Gotteserkenntnis die Menschen zu Feinden macht, die einen grausamen Krieg führen, den sie aber als „Frieden“ begrüßen. Der aufmerksame Leser erkennt hier zunächst eine – zweifellos ironische – intratextuelle Anspielung auf Weish 3,3, der einzigen anderen Stelle im Buch, die das Wort εἰρήνη, „Friede“, verwendet; die Götzendiener vergessen, dass der wahre Friede jener ist, den Gott den Gerechten nach dem physischen Tod zusichert.

Es kommt aber noch etwas Zweites hinzu: Was die Götzendiener „Frieden“ nennen ist in Wirklichkeit ein „großer Krieg von Unkenntnis“. Das Buch der Weisheit spielt hier sehr wahrscheinlich auf die „*Pax Romana*“ an, die von Oktavianus Augustus mit der Weihe der Ara Pacis in Rom 9 BCE symbolisch zelebriert wurde. Eine solche ironische Anspielung auf die „*Pax Romana*“ ist

30 Vgl. Luca Mazzinghi, „La barca della provvidenza: Sap 14,1–10 e la figura di Iside“, *Vivens Homo* 8 (1997): 61–90.

auch aus den klassischen Texten bekannt: „Rauben und Töten und Überfallen nennen sie fälschlich Imperium, und die Verwüstung, die sie verursachen, nennen sie Frieden“ („*atque, ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant*“), so eine berühmte Stelle bei Tacitus (*Agr.* 30). In der Welt verbreiten sie Korruption und Gewalt, so scheint der Verfasser zu sagen, und es gibt solche, die „Frieden“ nennen wollen, was für ihn eher ein Abgrund der Immoralität ist. Die verbale Ironie bezüglich des Wortes „Frieden“ grenzt damit an einen bitteren Sarkasmus in Anbetracht der realen historischen Situation.

4.4 15,7–13 *Der götzendienerische Töpfer*

Der Abschnitt Weish 15,7–13 stellt eine weitere Strophe dar, die der Kritik am götzendienerischen Handwerker gewidmet ist und die an den Abschnitt 13,10–19 anknüpft. Ich möchte im Besonderen auf V. 9 hinweisen:

Doch er hat eine Sorge – nicht, dass er entschlafen wird,
auch nicht, dass er ein bald endendes Leben hat,
sondern er wetteifert zum einen mit Goldschmieden und Silbergießern
und ahmt zum anderen Bronzeformer nach
und betrachtet es als eine Ehre, dass er Unechtes formt.

Subjekt dieses Verses ist erneut, wie in 13,10–19, der Handwerker, der Götzenbilder herstellt. Wenden wir uns zunächst der sprachlichen Ausdrucksweise des Verfassers zu: V. 9c enthält nicht weniger als vier *hapax* im Bereich der LXX. Das Verb ἀντερείδομαι bedeutet „unterstützen“, „widerstehen“,³¹ aber die Mehrheit der Kommentatoren vermutet, dass es hier im Sinne von „rivalisieren“ zu verstehen ist; das zweite *hapax* ist χρυσουργός („Goldschmied“); ἀργυροχόος („Silbergießer“) dagegen ist *hapax totius graecitatis*, wie auch das nachfolgende χαλκοπλάστης, „Bronzeformer“. Die konzentrierte Verwendung dieser seltenen Wörter, vor allem der beiden letzten, verleiht dem ganzen Text einen Ton ironischer Feierlichkeit.

Der götzendienerische Töpfer vermeint, seiner Sterblichkeit – anstatt sie zu akzeptieren – mit der Herstellung des Götzenbildes entfliehen zu können. Der Töpfer, der die raffinierteren Kunsthandwerker nachahmen will (V. 9cd), rühmt sich (V. 9e), Fälschungen herzustellen (κίβδηλα; vgl. 2,16), d.h. jene

31 Vgl. Giuseppe Scarpat, *Il libro della Sapienza*, III (Brescia: Paideia, 1999), 162; er schlägt vor, das Verb in der üblichen Bedeutung von „widerstehen“ zu übersetzen in dem Sinne, dass der Töpfer der Konkurrenz der fähigeren Handwerker „widersteht“, die einfacheren Bronze gießer nachahmt und den Ton bearbeitet, um preiswerte Götzenbilder für das abergläubige Volk herzustellen.

Götzenbilder, die er töpft. Der Handwerker wird vom Streben nach einer rein menschlichen δόξα, „Ehre“, angetrieben, aber auch, wie in Vv. 10–13 ersichtlich wird, vom Gewinnstreben. Der ganze Vers hat damit einen ironischen und wiederum auch sarkastischen Ton, indem er die Anmaßung des Handwerkers an den Pranger stellt.

Darüber hinaus wird der götzendienerische Töpfer, der sich zum kleinen Demiurgen aufspielt, Symbol des Menschen ohne Gott, für den das Eigeninteresse oberste Priorität hat; aber er schafft es nicht, dem „erdhaften Stoff“ (ὕλη γεώδης, vgl. 11,17) „Form zu geben“ und ist nicht fähig, jene lebendige Seele in sie hineinzugeben (15,11bc), die Gott dagegen dem Menschen verliehen hat. Es fällt daher in V. 13 der Gebrauch des Verbs δημιουργέω, „schaffen“, auf, das nur hier im Buch vorkommt und das mit Absicht am Schluss des Abschnitts steht; diese unfähige und dumme Nachahmung stellt für unseren Verfasser das wahre Drama des Götzendienstes dar.

Die verbale Ironie bezüglich des platonischen Verständnisses vom „Demiurgen“ wird verschärft durch den Verweis auf die Materie (ὕλη), die den Vers eröffnet. Im Gegensatz zu Gott, der die Welt ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης erschafft („aus gestaltlosem Stoff“, Weish 11,17), ist der Töpfer, der ebenfalls einen „erdhaften Stoff“ verwendet, nicht imstande, ihn zum Leben zu erwecken. Es handelt sich um eine Ironie, auf die schon Giuseppe Scarpata hingewiesen hat: „Das Wort δημιουργέω ist also ironisch unterlegt: Dieser ‚Zauberlehrling‘ erschafft zerbrechliche Objekte, die dem Aberglauben dienen, aber vermag es nicht, ihnen die ψυχή ἐνεργοῦσα einzuhauchen, wie dies der einzige Schöpfer getan hatte, der den Menschen geschaffen und belebt hat.“³² Eine subtile Ironie, die in diesem Fall die Fähigkeit des Lesers voraussetzt, Anspielungen auf die platonische Lehre zu erkennen: der Demiurg, die Materie, der erdhafter Stoff; vergessen wir dabei nicht, dass γεώδης von Platon in *Phaed.* 81c verwendet wird, um den „irdischen“ Teil zu bezeichnen, der die Seele beschwert.

5 Zusammenfassung: Die „theologische“ Funktion der Ironie im Buch der Weisheit

Edwin Good schließt seine Studie über die Ironie im Alten Testament mit der Bemerkung, dass die Ironie in der Heiligen Schrift erst im Kontext des Glaubens Israels ihre volle Bedeutung entfalte, da sie auf diesen ausgerichtet sei; wahre Ironie sei nur möglich im Kontext eines wahren Glaubens.³³ Ein freier und

³² Scarpata, *Sapienza*, III, 168.

³³ „True irony is possible only in context of true faith“; Good, *Irony*, 244; vgl. 241–247.

wahrer Glaube der, im Falle des Alten Testaments, dem Bund entspringe, der das Alte Testament von den umgebenden Religionen unterscheide: „Biblical faith, then, provides the basis for an ironic view of the world“.³⁴ Die Ironie hat, allgemeiner gesprochen, eine wichtige Funktion im Hinblick auf die Theologie; sie zeigt die Grenzen der Theologie auf und entlarvt die falschen Wahrheiten, d.h. die Götzenbilder, wobei sie zugleich zu einer „tieferen und verborgeneren Wahrheit“ hinleitet.³⁵

Im Buch der Weisheit stellt die Ironie einen Teil der vom Verfasser verwendeten rhetorischen Techniken dar; sie zielt nicht auf eine Dekonstruktion der traditionellen theologischen Sichtweisen der Wirklichkeit, wie dies zweifellos und in systematischer Weise im Buch Kohelet³⁶ der Fall ist, und – auf dramatischere Weise – in vielen Passagen des Ijobbuches.³⁷ Was die kommunikative Strategie des Buches der Weisheit betrifft, gilt es nicht zu vergessen, wer die Adressaten des Buches sind, nämlich die jüdische Jugend Alexandriens, welche der Verfasser für die Tugend der Weisheit und Übernahme von Verantwortung für das öffentliche Leben gewinnen will. Zu diesem Zweck bedient er sich einer epideiktischen literarischen Gattung, genauer jener des Enkomions.³⁸ Die verwendeten rhetorischen Techniken, zu denen die Ironie zählt, sind als Bestandteil eines Bildungsvorhabens zu betrachten, im Hinblick auf das der Verfasser seinem Publikum einen wirklich überzeugenden Text präsentieren will.

Das Buch der Weisheit bedient sich im Besonderen der Ambiguität, um vor allem eine falsche Sicht von Leben und Tod zu entlarven, die den „Gottlosen“ eigen ist, d.h. jenen abgefallenen Juden, die den jungen Juden Alexandriens einfachere Lebensideale vorschlugen. Zugleich dient die Ambiguität dazu, eine positivere und zweifellos auch innovativere Sicht bezüglich der Möglichkeit eines Lebens über den Tod hinaus zu vermitteln.

Das Buch der Weisheit bedient sich schließlich der Ironie, die nicht selten an einen wahrhaft beißenden Sarkasmus als eigentlicher *pars destruens* der Ironie grenzt, um eine götzendienerische Weltsicht von ihren Wurzeln her zu zerstören; eine solche war für den Verfasser im kulturellen Umfeld, in dem

34 Good, *Irony*, 246.

35 Jankelevitch, *La musique et les heures*, 69. Zum Verhältnis Theologie/Ironie vgl. Gaburro, *L'ironia*, 190–240.

36 Vgl. im Besonderen Franz Backhaus, „Kohelet und die Ironie. Vom Umgang mit Widersprüchen durch die Kunst der Ironie“, *BN* 101 (2000): 29–55; Vignolo, „La poetica ironica di Qohelet“ (mit ausführlichen Literaturangaben); Ders., „Maschera e sindrome regale: interpretazione ironico-psicanalitica di Qoh 1,12–2,26“, *Teologia* 26 (2001): 12–64.

37 Vgl. dazu die zahlreichen Beiträge zu dieser Tagung.

38 Zur Frage der literarischen Gattung vgl. Mazzinghi, *Weisheit*, 27–29.

er sich befand, auf starke und verführerische Weise wahrnehmbar, weshalb er seine Adressaten davor warnen wollte. Dennoch hat die Ironie auch ein positives Ziel, eine *pars construens*, nämlich die Leser zu bestärken im eigenen Glauben an den Gott, der sich in den Schriften Israels offenbart, an einen Gott mit einem „nicht-mittelbaren“ Namen (vgl. Weish 14,21), weshalb er nicht mit götzendienerischen Sichtweisen in Verbindung zu bringen ist, an einen Gott, der die ganze geschaffene Wirklichkeit liebt (vgl. Weish 11,24).

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PART 5

Irony in the New Testament



The Source of Irony in the Fourth Gospel

John Painter

Although the order of the first three Gospels was contested in the first two centuries, the place of John as last/fourth was attested by the earliest evidence before the end of the second century. It has long been recognized as the product of deep reflection over a long life, and as an expression of a developed theology in the early second century.¹ Clement of Alexandria (late second century) termed it “the spiritual Gospel,” and Augustine, writing circa 400, described it as “the theological Gospel.”² Each recognized the focus of the first three Gospels on the human life of Jesus, while the fourth Gospel was theologically focused on the relationship of Jesus to God. The latter is consistent with a date somewhere in the early years of the second century. Attempts to use palaeographic evidence to date relevant papyri early enough to assert the necessity of an earlier date are unjustifiable. Brent Nongbri has shown the limitations of palaeographic dating, arguing that the range of possible dates for these papyri falls between the first quarter of the second century and the early fourth century.³

- 1 What became the canonical order was affirmed as the historical order by Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.3.1 (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.2–4), and John was named as last of the four by Clement of Alexandria, who placed Matthew and Luke before Mark (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.4–7). Origen, like Irenaeus, affirmed what became the canonical order of the four Gospels (*Hist. eccl.* 6.25.3–6) in East and West by the second half of the fourth century. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* (*Hist. Eccl.*) Vol. 1, translated by Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press & London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1930.
- 2 See John Painter, “The Fourth Gospel: A “Spiritual” or “Theological” Gospel,” in *Anatomies of the Gospels and Beyond: Essays in Honour of R. Alan Culpepper*, ed. Mikeal C. Parsons, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, and Paul N. Anderson (Leiden: Brill, 2018, 348–365, esp. 361–364, and note the quotation of Clement preserved in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.* 6.14.5–7, esp. 6.14.7); and the quotation from Augustine’s *Harmony of the Gospels* in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine*, Vol. VIII, 141.
- 3 See Brent Nongbri’s articles on the relevant papyri: “The Limits of Papyrological Dating of Literary Papyri: Some Observations of the Date and Provenance of P. Bodmer II (P⁶⁶),” *Museum Helveticum* 71 (2014): 1–31; idem, “Reconsidering the Place of Papyrus Bodmer XIV–XV (P⁷⁵) in the Textual Criticism of the New Testament,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 405–437; idem, “Palaeography, Precision and Publicity: Further Thoughts on P. Rylands m.457 (P⁵²),” *NTS* 66/4 (Oct. 2020): 471–499. Though the articles treat individual papyri, they are programmatic in scope, and provide a qualification concerning the range of dates relevant to these papyri.

That means, not later than the early fourth century. Other means of dating provide more precise evidence, but this is lacking for the fourth Gospel before the mid-second century. All available evidence suggests that the fourth Gospel is somewhat later than the Synoptics and bears the marks of coherent theological development. By this I imply the development of the tradition by a single tradition bearer, though the apparent conclusion at 20:30–31, and the plural attestation to authorship by the beloved disciple in 21:24, suggests that chapter 21 is an addition by other hands to send the Gospel on its way after the death of the author.⁴ I am inclined to favor an early second century date, but something a little later cannot be excluded, because there is no evidence of the fourth Gospel before the mid-second century, when Justin Martyr quoted from John 3:5 in his First Apology, 6:4–5, circa 155–157 CE. That means, not later than 157 CE.

1 Verbal Irony

A characteristic example of verbal irony in the fourth Gospel is found in the five distinctive uses of ὑψωθήναι, 3:14 (×2); 8:28; 12:32, 34. The paradoxical meaning is established in the analogy developed in 3:14. There, the lifting up of Jesus on the cross to die is revealed as the means by which he is exalted to ‘heaven,’ evoking faith in the saving love of God for the world, 3:16 in the context of 3:15–17. The paradox is foreshadowed in the Prologue, especially in 1:14, and 18. The divine Word became flesh ... and we beheld his glory” and “No one has ever seen God; the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, *this person* has made God known.” In the Gospel narrative, the mystery of the unseen God is made known in the human person of Jesus. The revelation of the glory of God in Jesus (1:14, 18) is reinforced by the references to the glorification of Jesus (in 7:39; 8:54; 12:16, 23). There are other examples of this play on words, but the main task of this chapter is to feature dramatic irony.

4 Contrary to Hill in “Authentication of John,” I find unconvincing the attempt to construe the plural “we know” of 21:24 as the author’s self-attestation. See Charles Hill, “The Authentication of John: Self-Disclosure, Testimony, and Verification in John 21:24,” in *The Language and Literature of the New Testament: Essays in Honor of Stanley E. Porter’s 60th Birthday*, ed. Lois K. Fuller Dow, Craig A. Evans, and Andrew W. Pitts, BibInt 150 (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 398–437.

2 Dramatic Irony and the Prologue

Structurally, dramatic irony dominates the Gospel. For this, the Prologue is the key, conveyed in the words of the *omniscient* narrator, into which a summary sample of the witness of John is introduced in 1:15, “thrown forward” from 1:27, 30–31.⁵ It has been drawn from the opening narrative of the Gospel, which begins with the mission (1:6)/witness (1:19) of John, “This is the witness of John when ...” (1:19–42), which transitions to the mission of Jesus (1:43–51).

3 John 1:1–18: The Prologue

Because of the key role of the Prologue, something needs to be said in response to recent rejection of 1:1–18 as the Prologue of the fourth Gospel. Since P. J. Williams challenged “the modern recognition of the Prologue” in a series of papers and an article between 2006 and 2011, I have seen no response in defense of 1:1–18 as the Prologue of the fourth Gospel. There has been support for this challenge. Williams argues that there is no early evidence, textual or patristic, recognizing 1:1–18 as the Prologue of the fourth Gospel.⁶ Apparently, the earliest textual evidence attests a paragraph break after 1:5, but none after 1:18. What is more, Williams asserts that this recognition is absent until modern times, and argues that lack of early recognition of 1:1–18 as “the Prologue” puts it in question. For him, much hangs on the lack of any early evidence of a paragraph break after 1:18. Early evidence is not abundant, and I know of no study of the reliability of paragraph breaks in the earliest papyri. Are they a reliable guide to the structure of *the earliest manuscripts* of the fourth Gospel, or of the New Testament as a whole? More importantly, Williams makes no attempt to look for the reasons for, what he recognizes, “is now widely regarded as a distinct section of text, Jn 1:1–18.” Nevertheless, he concludes that it “was

5 Reference to the omniscient narrator in relation to the fourth Gospel goes back at least as far as Alan Culpepper’s 1983 use of the term in his *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1983). There he defines the role of the omniscient narrator as one who supplies “privileged information which no ordinary observer of the action would have” (19). The Prologue certainly qualifies.

6 The article was delivered as a paper at the British New Testament Conference in 2006 and the Society of Biblical Literature Johannine Seminar in November 2007, before being published as P. J. Williams, “Not the Prologue of John,” *JSNT* 33/4 (2011): 375–386. More precisely, Williams argues that 1:1–18 is not the Prologue of John. The published article benefited from wide discussion prior to publication, and without any evidence of encountering a serious defense of 1:1–18 as the Prologue.

not regarded as such by the earliest interpreters.”⁷ Even if he is right about the *absence* of evidence, it is a precarious ground upon which to mount a definitive case. Further, there are flaws in the case he has presented, as well as evidence in favor of its recognition. Nevertheless, I know of no response to Williams’ article defending recognition as the Prologue. Rather, others have sought to build on his case.

Aware of Williams’ article, Martinus de Boer, in a 2018 review in the *Review of Biblical Literature*, concludes his assessment of Stan Harstine’s 2005 book concerning scholarly debate on the purpose of the Prologue in the last two hundred years, by noting that Harstine has ignored Williams’ article.⁸ He also notes that his (de Boer’s) article, making use of Williams’ work, argues that John 1:1–5 “constitute the gospel’s original and still functioning Prologue.”⁹ Williams had noted the precedent for this paragraph in early papyri, but had not advocated it as the Prologue. Clearly, 1:1–5 is a distinct part of the Prologue, but hardly the whole of it.

I also noted in an earlier publication that Jo-Ann Brant appeals to Williams’ 2007 Society of Biblical Literature paper to support her argument that 1:1–14 constitutes the Prologue.¹⁰ Williams does not give much support for any Prologue. His purpose was to assert that 1:1–18 is “Not the Prologue of John,” as his title asserts, and is reaffirmed in his abstract at the beginning of the article. Contrary to Brant’s argument for a 1:1–14 Prologue, the patristic evidence to which she appeals does not support her argument. Neither Irenaeus nor Origen was dealing with the Prologue as such, and neither argues, or provides support for 1:1–14 as the Prologue or as a literary unit.¹¹

While disputing Williams’ assertion of the absence of evidence of patristic recognition of the Prologue, an alternative form of argument, not based on paragraphs in early manuscripts, or patristic references, but based on the text itself, makes the case for 1:1–18 as the Prologue. These verses (1:1–18) describe no interaction between participants in the story. The Prologue is addressed exclusively to the reader. Interaction between participants in the story begins in 1:19. I also note that William’s article ignores the 1994 work of Elizabeth Harris, the first chapter of which deals with “the relation of the Prologue to the rest of the Gospel.” Here, Harris, obviously unaware of William’s as yet unwritten article,

7 Williams, “Not the Prologue of John,” 375.

8 Stan Harstine, *A History of the Two-Hundred-Year Scholarly Debate about the Purpose of the Prologue of the Gospel of John: How Does Our Understanding of the Prologue Affect our Interpretation of the Subsequent Text?* (Lewiston NY: Mellen, 2015).

9 Martinus C. De Boer, “The Original Prologue to the Gospel of John,” *NTS* 61 (2015): 448–467.

10 Brant, *John*, 26–27.

11 See Painter, “Bridge into a New World,” esp. 74–76.

answers in advance many of the criticisms Williams makes concerning the failure of scholars to justify the recognition of 1:1–18 as the Prologue.¹² Harris notes various studies of the relation of the Prologue (1:1–18) to the rest of the Gospel, beginning with Adolf Harnack in 1892, before turning back to patristic references to “the Prologue,” referring to “πρόλογος derived from the verb προλέγειν in the sense of ‘to announce beforehand,’ which became a technical term of literary criticism and of rhetoric ... emerging in the 6th century BCE ... The function of this prologue (1:1–18) fits this pattern. Its purpose was to announce beforehand the plot to the audience.” She also notes that “Jerome refers to these verses (1:1–18) as *proemium* in the Preface to his Commentary on Matthew.”¹³ Not only does his Latin provide early precedent for the use of the Prologue in the fourth Gospel; it also describes what was already an ancient rhetorical practice that fits the Johannine Prologue. In the Prologue, the events to be narrated in what follows (1:19), are thrown forward into a context that gives an advantage to readers over participants in the narrative of the Gospel that follows. Clearly, Jesus has this insight from the beginning, as does the man John in 1:30–34. Both of whom are featured in the Prologue, Jesus in 1:14–18, and John in 1:6–8, 15, where his witness, given in the narrative of 1:27, 30–33, is thrown forward into 1:15. Thus, just as Jesus, John, and the narrator share the insight of the Prologue, so does the reader. What is more, there are two instances in the later narratives, where the omniscient narrator of the Prologue intervenes to enlighten the reader of what was hidden from participants other than Jesus at the time (see 2:19–22 and 12:12–16).

4 2:1–11: A Bridging and Consolidating Episode of the Narrative

Following the gathering of the first disciples (1:35–51), Jesus and his disciples attend a wedding in Cana of Galilee via an invitation *extended* by the mother of Jesus. When there was a shortage of wine, perhaps implied to be a consequence of the additional guests, the mother of Jesus initiates his intervention. Jesus provides abundantly, by performing the first of two Cana signs (see also 4:46–54). Consequently, we are told, “his disciples believed in him” (2:11). This must imply significant growth in their belief in Jesus, which began when the

12 Elizabeth Harris, *Prologue and Gospel: The Theology of the Fourth Evangelist*, JSNTSup 107 (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 9–25.

13 E. Harris, *Prologue and Gospel*, 12 including n. 1; 13–18. In note 1 page 12, Harris provides the reference to the Preface of Jerome's Commentary on Matthew in *Corpus Christianorum* (Series Latina LXXVII, 3).

witness of John to Jesus led the first two of them to *follow* Jesus, *following* being an essential element of discipleship. Subsequently, these two led others to follow also (1:29–51).

5 2:13–22: “The Cleansing of the Temple”

Following the wedding, and a brief stay in Capernaum with the family of Jesus, because the Passover was near, Jesus went up to Jerusalem to visit the Temple. In the Synoptics, this incident occurs as a final provocative act leading to Jesus’ arrest, trial, and execution. It occurs early in the fourth Gospel, providing a further consolidation of discipleship.¹⁴ Although it is not said that the disciples went with him, their presence is implied by 2:17 and by the reference to their later reflective memory of the earlier event (2:22).¹⁵ When Jesus drove out the animals and money changers from the Temple, “the Jews” (2:18, Temple authorities? cf. 1:19) challenged Jesus to provide a *sign* to validate his authority. Given Jesus’ action, this is a mild, low-key response, with no suggestion of aggression. It is consistent with the character of the Jewish delegation to John in 1:19. The Jewish authorities in the Temple do not defend the commercial operation of the Temple, nor do they object to Jesus’ explanation of his action (2:15–16). Indeed, they might have agreed with the way the disciples understood Jesus’ action at the time when they *remembered* the scripture of Psalm 69:9, “for zeal for your house has consumed me.” What the “Jews” challenged was his authority to carry out such a reform. They demanded a “sign” validating his authority to do so (2:19), probably they implied a sign from God. They would hardly have expected Jesus’ enigmatic response, “Destroy this Temple and in three days I will raise it up.” Part of the enigma is obscured in English translation. The opening verb in Jesus’ response is second person *plural* in the *imperative* (commanding) mood. “*You* (plural) destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). This is a conditional sentence, in which the performance of their action is a necessary condition of Jesus’ responsive sign. At one level, it refers to the Jewish cause of the Roman destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, in reprisal for the Jewish revolt against Roman rule. The revolt began in 66 CE and led to the destruction of the Temple and much of Jerusalem in 70 CE. It is ironic that the Jewish revolt caused the destruction of the Temple, not only

14 See Matt 21:12–13; Mark 11:15–17; Lk 19:45–46; John 2:13–22.

15 The first of these two references to remembering (2:17) was an association of Scripture (Ps 69:9) with the event. The latter, however (2:22) seems to presuppose the role of the Spirit/Paraclete and to involve inspired memory in reflection on Jesus’ enigmatic saying in 2:19. See 14:26. That Jesus spoke of the temple of his body is not at all obvious in context. The omniscient narrator makes it clear to the reader.

by their abuse of it, as implied by Jesus' action (2:14–16), but by provoking the Roman suppression of the revolt with the consequent punitive destruction of the Temple. By the time the fourth Gospel was written/published, this was all past history, and the Temple continues to lie waste to this day. The irony of this is, it was not destroyed by Jesus. "You destroy this Temple ..."

Another side to this is made explicit by the omniscient narrator, who inserts a retrospective reflection on the saying of Jesus, making clear what even the disciples did not understand at the time. What they understood then was a scripture that illuminated Jesus' zeal for the Temple (2:17). The hidden meaning, revealed by the omniscient narrator, who notes that, the Temple to which Jesus referred was "his body" (2:21). According to the fourth Gospel, the Jewish authorities brought about the crucifixion of Jesus, by plotting and collaborating in his arrest, and handing him over to Pilate. Then, when Pilate was reluctant to act, they exerted pressure on him to crucify Jesus (see 11:47–53; 18:1–19:16), thus being instrumental in bringing about the destruction of the Temple of his body.

Somewhat surprisingly, Jesus says, "and in three days *I* will raise it up again" (2:19). Normally, it is affirmed that "God raised him from the dead" (see Acts 4:10; 5:30, etc.). The Johannine Jesus asserts that the Father has given him the authority, therefore he says, "I have the authority to lay down my life and to take it again" (10:17–18). This is a double irony. The Jews bring about the destruction of the Temple and the crucifixion of Jesus (the destruction of the temple of his body), and the demanded sign to validate his authority was given in the resurrection of Jesus. "You destroy this body, and in three days I will raise it up again." The fourth Gospel nowhere suggests that the sign was granted to the Jewish authorities. It is communicated to the reader by the omniscient narrator in the witness of the fourth Gospel, where the risen Jesus appears to his followers.

In the farewell discourses, Jesus attributes this reflective illumination to the coming of the Paraclete, taking the place of Jesus, *reminding* the disciples, in a new and illuminated way, of all that Jesus had taught them (14:16, 25–26). This illumination could occur only after Jesus' departure (death, resurrection, exaltation, glorification) and the coming of the Spirit–Paraclete (14:16; 16:6–7).¹⁶ This subsequently illuminated teaching graces the reader of the fourth Gospel with knowledge/experience. The irony is that participants in the story, in the presence of Jesus, even the disciples, fail to grasp what every reader can see plainly. See also 12:16 in the context of 12:12–16.

16 See John Painter, "The Farewell Discourses," *NTS* 27 (July 1981): 525–543; idem, *The Quest for the Messiah: The History, Literature, and Theology of the Johannine Community* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993²), 417–435.

The use of the dramatic Prologue, which is in the voice of the omniscient narrator, sheds light that enables the reader to know more than those involved in the story narrated in the fourth Gospel. Each of the four Gospels is written by an author who knows the end of the story from the beginning, but each of the Synoptics is narrated from the beginning, following the development of the story. This progresses from the author's view of the beginning of the story to the perceived end. The fourth Gospel is quite different, beginning with a distinctive Prologue that privileges the reader(s) from the beginning. The beginning is not the birth of Jesus, as with Matthew and Luke, nor with John the Baptist, as in Mark, though Mark is proximately closer to, and the man John is drawn into the Prologue in 1:6–8, 15 in a way that transforms John's role from the beginning of the narrative (1:19). The Prologue begins before the creation of all things, with the complex mystery of the one *God*, followed by the creation of all things by God, by means of God's λόγος.¹⁷ This foreshadows the reality of the mystery of God, beyond sight and knowledge, but revealed in the creative-revealing work by God's λόγος.¹⁸ It is further clarified by 1:14–18, which embodies the witness of John (1:15) to the revelation of the glory of God in ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο. I take this to mean that the revelation of God occurs in the man Jesus Christ (1:17).¹⁹ This aspect of the Prologue anticipates the story that begins in 1:19. It underlies and is presupposed by 1:19–51, in a way not anticipated in the Synoptics, even Mark. Nevertheless, both the fourth Gospel and Mark, begin their story with John (John 1:19–51, and Mark 1:1–8). The introduction of the man called John into the Prologue (1:6–8, 15) transforms the opening narrative in which John's witness to Jesus leads two of his disciples to become the first disciples of Jesus, and the means by which the disciples of Jesus are gathered (1:19–51), provisionally fulfilling the role of John in 1:6–8. Everything emerges from this beginning.

17 The underlying evidence of the use of the Wisdom literature in the Prologue is well known; see C. H. Dodd, *Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 274–275, and the work of J. Rendel Harris in *The Origin of the Prologue of St John's Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1917), who is less well known though more influential. See Prov 3:18–19; 8:22–30; Wisdom of Solomon 7–9; Sirach 24; 1 Enoch 42. One of the features of his work is his emphasis on the use of Wisdom interchangeably with Word and Spirit to express the mystery of God in revelation and in the activity of God in the world, see John 1:3, 10, 18. This paradox underlies much of the irony.

18 See Gen 1:1–3, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24; Ps 33:6 (LXX 32:6).

19 Only here (1:17), and in 17:3, does the fourth Gospel use the double name/title, “Jesus Christ.” Elsewhere, the fourth Gospel refers to “Jesus,” as do the Synoptics. Nowhere does the fourth Gospel refer to Jesus simply as Christ, which is a Paulinism. The revelation of God is in the man Jesus, in whom God's presence is known. Nevertheless, God, whom no one has ever seen, has been made known in the man Jesus (1:18).

6 The Prologue: The Omniscient Narrator, the Man Called John, and Jesus

In the Prologue, three figures emerge with greater and lesser clarity. First, and most clearly, there is the figure of John, whose words have been “thrown forward” into 1:15. Second, there is also Jesus, who does not speak in the Prologue, but is the main speaker in the body of the Gospel, and is named Jesus Christ in 1:17 (cf. 17:3), and nowhere else in the fourth Gospel.²⁰ The Prologue not only opens up an ultimate beginning, it unveils the significance of the completed mission of Jesus in 1:18. Thirdly, the narrator speaks for a believing community throughout the Prologue. John’s voice is revealed by the use of the third person singular pronoun in the introduction of “his” witness in 1:15, as the named representative of the corporate witness of the omniscient narrator, introduced with the first-person plural “we” in 1:14, and resumed with “we” at the beginning of 1:16–18 to conclude the Prologue.

John is the only named speaker in the Prologue and the main speaker in 1:19–37. Jesus speaks his first two words in 1:38–39. Two of the disciples of John were “following” Jesus in response to the witness of John. Jesus turns and asks them, “What are you seeking?” (Τί ζητεῖτε;), to which they answered, Ῥαββί, ποῦ μένεις; to which Jesus replied, “Come, and you will see. So they came and they saw ...”²¹

20 Käsemann linked the Prologue with John 17 in his 1968 English edition of *The Testament of Jesus*. He says of chapter 17, “this chapter is a summary of the Johannine discourses and in this respect is a counterpart to the prologue. It should be rewarding to unroll the problem almost, as it were, from the end, beginning with chapter 17” (3). I take it that he implies that the counterpart relationship with Prologue is to unroll the problem from the beginning on the basis of the Prologue. Is it accidental that the two uses of “Jesus Christ” are exclusive the end of the Prologue (1:17) and the beginning of chapter 17 (17:3)? See Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus: A Study of the Gospel of John in the Light of Chapter 17* (trans. Gerhard Krodel; London: SCM, 1968).

21 Jesus’ first words alert the reader to the difference of the Synoptic accounts where Jesus initiates the call of his disciples. In the fourth Gospel, the first disciples seek him and initiate the gathering of others. The use of ποῦ μένεις in their question and Jesus’ response, “Come and you will see,” is followed by “So they came and they saw ποῦ μένει.” Given the use of this verb 11 times in chapter 15, it is possible that it is used with a double sense here, to describe both where Jesus was lodging for the night, and to refer to his *abiding* relationship with the Father. See John 1:51 and Painter, *Quest for the Messiah*, 5–10, 163–212; idem, “Quest Stories in John 1–4.”

7 John 3: Jesus, John, and the Omniscient Narrator

In reversed order to that of the Prologue, the same three are depicted in a rather remarkable way. The standard role of the narrator is in reporting each incident. But the narrator's role appears to be more complex in the dialogue between Jesus with Nicodemus. This proceeds straightforwardly in 3:1–12. Then, although there is no formal exit of Nicodemus in 3:1–12, a transition to a more general context seems to occur at 3:13. In 3:13–21 Nicodemus seems to have disappeared, and Jesus seems to be speaking in more general terms to the readers alone. We could say that, here the omniscient narrator has intervened to communicate further meaning to the already informed reader. That the omniscient narrator should become the interpreter of the words of Jesus is not surprising. What follows in 3:22–36 is more surprising.

Jesus and his disciples return to the region where John and his disciples were baptizing, bringing the two baptizing missions into contact, 3:22–23. The focus turns from Jesus to the disciples of John, who report that the rival baptizing mission of Jesus is making more disciples than John, 3:25–26. His reply runs from 3:27–36, but only verses 27–30 are relevant to John and his disciples. John's concluding words to his disciples are appropriate, "he must increase, I must decrease." What follows (3:31–36) seems to go beyond the context of dialogue between John and his disciples, whose presence is no longer evident, but there is no reported exit, or indication of a change of speaker. Nevertheless, what follows seems to be addressed to the reader alone, 3:31–36. But because John is introduced in the Prologue, he speaks from that perspective, and speaks like Jesus, and the omniscient narrator. In 3:31–36 John speaks directly to the reader. This change is perhaps implied by the paragraph break between 3:27–30 and 3:31–36.²²

8 The Connection of the Prologue and John 17

This connection has already been mentioned in relation to the exclusive use of "Jesus Christ" in 1:17 and 17:3 (see note 17). Although in John 17 Jesus addresses

22 Both the Greek New Testament and Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece* show paragraph breaks after 1:18 and also after 3:30. Evidently that need not mean that it is indicated in the earliest manuscripts. At the very least, it means that the editors recognized a significant change at these points and, until there is a study of the reliability of paragraph breaks signalled in the earliest manuscripts, present scholarly judgement seems to be justified.

God as "Father," he also speaks to the reader.²³ It is formally a prayer and contains petitions. However, it reads more like a discourse on mission. It outlines succinctly, the Johannine Jesus' theology of mission. In the prayer Jesus speaks with thanksgiving concerning his completed mission (17:1–5); then the *prayer* turns to his commission of his disciples to continue his mission (17:18) and work in the world and for the world (17:6–19). This part of the prayer leads to the continuing mission of those who believed through the word of his disciples (17:20–26). The objective of the continuing mission of Jesus throughout the generations is, "that the world may believe that you sent me" (17:21), "that the world may know that you sent me and that you loved them as you loved me" (17:23). Briefly, it can be said that the mission of Jesus, expressed in 3:16, is extended universally in 17:18 to Jesus' disciples. Here, that commission is treated as a past event, like the mission of Jesus. Nevertheless, when the narrative recommences in 18:1, the commission of the disciples awaits the first resurrection appearance of Jesus to his disciples in 20:21. It has been projected back into the great prayer of John 17:18 in a way comparable to the projection of the witness of John in the Prologue in 1:15, but not yet given the narrative until 1:27, 30–31.

The commission of the disciples in 17:18 has a chain effect, passed on via those who believe through their words, until the world believes and knows God's love for the world. Is it ironic that the prayer of Jesus becomes a missiological plan and motivation for the transformation of the world? Ironically, a prayer addressed to the Father (God) functions to inspire and guide the reader in the art of world transformation. For this to happen, the life of the Word made flesh in Jesus needs to be present in a transformative way in the lives of successive generations (see 17:21–23). It is worth noting that these references are not about Christian unity, although that might be nurtured by the fulfilment of prayer. The prayer concerns the continuing presence of the generous loving God (3:16) in/with those who carry on his mission in the world. Käsemann's view of John 17 as a summation of the fourth Gospel makes sense in its direct address to the reader, much like the Prologue.

The prayer of Jesus to the Father has no human audience in the text, but like the Prologue, it is addressed to the reader and sets out the program for world transformation. It is as if, with John 17:1–5, the Gospel has reached its climax, and the transition to the mission of the disciples (17:6–19), and those who

23 John 14:31 concludes with Jesus' words, "Arise, let us be on our way from here!" What follows is more discourse and the prayer (chapters 15–17). John 15 and 16 presume the presence of the disciples, though they are less obviously present than in chapters 13–14. John 17 is different. It assumes no audience but God and the reader.

believe through their witness is about to follow (see 17:20–26). But the irony of what follows is the betrayal of Jesus by one of the disciples (Judas, 18:2–3), his arrest, and trial, at which one of the disciples denies him three times (Peter, 18:12–18, 25–27), and having been handed on to Pilate by the Jewish authorities Annas and Caiaphas, they exerted pressure on a reluctant Pilate to sentence Jesus to death by crucifixion (18:28–39). At this point it appears that Jesus' mission will end in a debacle, the crucifixion of Jesus, the flight and scattering of the disciples and the end of the Jesus movement. The debacle of the disciples, who were the essential link to the continuation of the mission of Jesus (17:18), seemed to herald a lost cause. Irony runs through this narrative. On the third day after the crucifixion, the disciples distraught and desperate are behind locked doors in Jerusalem when Jesus appeared to them and commissioned them to continue his mission (20:21). The words are a repetition of 17:18, but, as if for the first time. Perhaps that expresses the sense of a new beginning after dismal failure. Perhaps there is the added sense of a continuing presence in the absence of Jesus (20:22–23).

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Disambiguating Forms of Irony in Second Corinthians 10–13

Matthew Pawlak

When it comes to the subject of irony in Paul, no passage has been more discussed than 2 Corinthians 10–13. Identifying irony in these chapters is not only a linguistic exercise but also has significant implications for how the interpreter characterizes Paul's aims, as well as Paul himself—especially throughout the so-called “fool's speech.” Ascribing irony to Paul can function to distance Paul from his foolish boasting, mitigating what could otherwise be perceived as a problematic discourse. Glenn Holland, for example, does this by seeing didactic intent behind Paul's use of irony, writing that Paul's irony in the fool's speech “invites the reader to look past the surface meaning of the text in order to find its deeper, ‘true’ meaning.” This process is meant to correct the Corinthians' perspective and encourage them to apply their “spiritual insight.”¹ Such an interpretation deploys Paul's use of irony to characterize his boasting as edifying to his congregation rather than as straightforward self-promotion.

While the identification of irony can have a considerable impact on our reading of Paul, dedicated studies of irony in 2 Corinthians 10–13 have produced inconsistent results. Johannes Loubser describes 2 Corinthians 10–13 as an “ironic discourse.”² Ryan Schellenberg, by contrast, argues that “[Paul's] boasting as a whole simply does not admit of an ironical reading,” even if he “does make isolated ironic statements” across 2 Corinthians 10–13.³

- 1 Glenn Holland, “Speaking like a Fool: Irony in 2 Corinthians 10–13,” in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. Thomas Olbricht and Stanley Porter, JSNTSS 90 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1993), 251; cf. Glenn Holland, *Divine Irony* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna, 2000), 138, 156.
- 2 J. A. Loubser, “A New Look at Paradox and Irony in 2 Corinthians 10–13,” *Neotestamentica* 26.2 (1992): 512–518; cf. Holland, “Speaking like a Fool,” 250–264; Lars Aejmelaeus, *Schwachheit als Waffe: Die Argumentation des Paulus im Tränenbrief (2. Kor. 10–13)*, SFEQ 78 (Helsinki: Finnish Exegetical Society, 2000), 38; Tor Vegge, *Paulus und das antike Schulwesen: Schule und Bildung des Paulus*, BZNTW 134 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 423; D. Duling, “2 Corinthians 11:22: Historical Context, Rhetoric, and Ethnicity,” *HTS* 64.2 (2008): 819.
- 3 Ryan Schellenberg, *Rethinking Paul's Rhetorical Education: Comparative Rhetoric and 2 Corinthians 10–13*, SBLCL 10 (Atlanta, GA: SBL, 2013), 170.

Christopher Forbes focuses on ancient treatments of *eirōneia* (εἰρωνεία) and the characterization of the “ironic man” (*eirōn*, εἰρων), arguing that these can illuminate Paul’s rhetoric throughout his boasting in 2 Corinthians 10–12.⁴ Other scholars have identified specific ironic comments across 2 Corinthians 10–13,⁵ and Aída Spencer describes 2 Corinthians 10–12 specifically as being “bitterly ironical,” but without descending into sarcasm.⁶

In addition to generating conflicting interpretations, previous studies have also run the risk of conflating different forms of irony. Herbert Colston, a leading figure in irony studies, lists more than ten different forms of irony, and his list is not exhaustive.⁷ These are often very different phenomena in terms of their expression and rhetorical effects. Treating the subject of irony in general can lead to problematic conclusions when scholars assume that what holds true for one form of irony also holds true for another.

This study addresses these problems by disambiguating what specific forms of irony occur where in 2 Corinthians 10–13. We will focus on two major forms of irony discussed in contemporary irony studies: verbal irony and situational irony. These are, arguably, two of the most fundamental forms of irony and together account for a large proportion of phenomena commonly considered ironic. We will define verbal and situational irony in turn, along with their relevant subspecies, before identifying where they occur in 2 Corinthians 10–13 and discussing the exegetical implications that arise therefrom. We will also clarify where these modern concepts do and do not overlap with ancient treatments of *eirōneia*. This distinction is essential for avoiding anachronism in interpretation.

4 Christopher Forbes, “Comparison, Self-Praise and Irony: Paul’s Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric,” *New Testament Studies* 32.1 (1986): 10–22.

5 Aída Besançon Spencer, “The Wise Fool (and the Foolish Wise): A Study of Irony in Paul,” *Novum Testamentum* 23.4 (1981): 351, 355–358; Forbes, “Paul’s Boasting,” 16, 18, 22; Holland, “Speaking like a Fool,” 255, 257; Duling, “2 Corinthians 11:22,” 828; Margaret Sim, *A Relevant Way to Read: A New Approach to Exegesis and Communication* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2016), 57–61.

6 Spencer, “Wise Fool,” 351.

7 Herbert Colston, “Irony Performance and Perception: What Underlies Verbal, Situational and Other Ironies?” in *Irony in Language Use and Communication*, ed. Angeliki Athanasiadou and Herbert Colston (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2017), 19.

1 Verbal Irony (*eirōneia*): Sarcasm (*sarkasmos*) and Self-Deprecating Irony (*asteismos*)

This section defines verbal irony and two of its major subcategories, along with the ancient terms that broadly correspond to them. Contemporary irony studies is a wide-ranging interdisciplinary endeavor that has produced much significant and nuanced work on verbal irony.⁸ For the purpose of this essay, we will offer a brief working definition of verbal irony that is compatible with many of the major theories circulating in irony studies and that is close enough to ancient definitions to allow for meaningful comparison. We will then list briefly where different forms of verbal irony occur within 2 Corinthians 10–13, but without going into significant exegetical detail as this is available elsewhere.⁹

Alan Bailin argues that inconsistency and implicitness are essential components of verbal irony. That is, verbal irony occurs when a speaker produces an utterance that implies an attitude or evaluation inconsistent with the attitude or evaluation that one would normally associate with their utterance.¹⁰ For example, sarcasm, a subtype of verbal irony, occurs when an utterance that would normally express positive evaluation implies negative evaluation—such as saying “nice haircut” to someone who cut their own hair badly.¹¹ Ironic praise, or affectionate insults, occur when an utterance that would normally be an insult is used to imply a compliment—such as referring to a friend who is a star student as an “underachiever.”¹²

This conception of verbal irony corresponds broadly, although not completely, to the ways in which *eirōneia* was described in rhetorical and grammatical texts written within Paul’s historical context. In these texts, *eirōneia* is often described as implying something oppositional to the literal meaning of the utterance (ἀντιτρομένη τὸνναντίον [Greg. Cor.], *Trop.* 15; *contraria ostenduntur*, Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.54; cf. *Rhetorica Anonyma*, *Trop.* 20). Modern accounts have discarded the idea of meaning inversion as central to verbal irony, as it

8 For an overview of developments in the field, see Herbert Colston, “Irony as Indirectness Cross-Linguistically: On the Scope of Generic Mechanisms,” in *Indirect Reports and Pragmatics in the World Languages*, ed. Alessandro Capone, Manuel García-Carpintero, and Alessandra Falzone, Perspectives in Pragmatics, Philosophy & Psychology 19 (Cham: Springer, 2019), 109–120.

9 Matthew C. Pawlak, *Sarcasm in Paul’s Letters*, SNTSMS 182 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 194–219.

10 Alan Bailin, “On the Characteristics of Verbal Irony,” *Semiotica* 204 (2015): 112.

11 Cf. John Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap: Sarcasm, Alienation, and the Evolution of Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 25.

12 See Richard Brunsch and Willibald Ruch, “Studying Irony Detection Beyond Ironic Criticism: Let’s Include Ironic Praise,” *FP* 8.606 (2017): 1–3, 10–13; Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap*, 22–23.

creates a number of conceptual problems.¹³ Ancient authors should not, however, be thought of as only viewing oppositional meaning (τὸ ὑναντίον/*contraria*) as the inversion of semantic meaning. Sarcasm (*sarkasmos*)—a subtype of *eirōneia*—for example, can be described solely in terms of affect inversion: “expressing dishonour through kind words” (διὰ χρηστῶν ῥημάτων τὴν ἀτιμίαν ἐμφαίνων, *Rhetorica Anonyma, Trop.* 23)¹⁴ or “disguis[ing] bitter taunts in gentle words” (*tristia dicamus mollioribus verbis*, Quintilian, *Inst.* 8.6.57 [Butler, LCL]; cf. *Inst.* 8.6.55). With broad compatibility, as well as minor differences, between ancient definitions of *eirōneia* and verbal irony, we may accept that most of what qualifies as verbal irony is also *eirōneia*,¹⁵ and most *sarkasmos* is also sarcasm.

Ancient Greek does not appear to have a term for ironic praise. Instead, *asteismos* (ἀστεῖσμός) was considered the inverse of sarcasm.¹⁶ *Asteismos* is a self-deprecating form of irony in which the speaker ostensibly says something negative about themselves that implies a positive evaluation (see Tryphon, *Trop.* 19, 24).¹⁷ *Asteismos* therefore qualifies as verbal irony (ironic praise), although *asteismos* itself is a narrower category than ironic praise.

1.1 Sarcasm and Asteismos in 2 Corinthians 10–13

Paul engages in *asteismos* when he describes himself as someone “who, face-to-face, behaves timidly with you, but, when away, acts boldly toward you” (ὃς κατὰ πρόσωπον μὲν ταπεινὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀπὼν δὲ θαρρῶ εἰς ὑμᾶς, 10:1). This assertion ostensibly accepts the criticism cited in 10:10 that his letters are forceful while his physical presence is weak. The way Paul’s alleged concession to being forceful in his letters clashes with his mild exhortation “by the meekness and gentleness of Christ” (10:1), shows that Paul does not really accept this criticism but is engaging in self-deprecating irony.¹⁸

13 Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, “Irony and the Use–Mention Distinction,” in *Radical Pragmatics*, ed. Peter Cole (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 295–296; Deirdre Wilson, “The Pragmatics of Verbal Irony: Echo or Pretence?” *Lingua* 116.10 (2006): 1726; Colston, “Indirectness,” 112–113.

14 Where not otherwise indicated, translations are my own.

15 That is, *eirōneia* defined as a trope or figure of speech in texts ranging from the first century BCE to the second century CE. For other meanings of *eirōneia*, see §2.

16 Quintilian separates his examples of *sarkasmos* and *asteismos* with the words *et contra* (*Inst.* 8.6.55).

17 Quintilian cites an apologetic example from Cicero: “We are seen as such typical ‘orators,’ since we’ve always imposed ourselves on the people” (*oratores visi sumus et populo imposuimus*, *Inst.* 8.6.55).

18 Cf. Margaret Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 2 vols., ICC 32B (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 2:598.

Paul is sarcastic in complimenting the Corinthians for bearing with false teachers in 11:4 (εἰ μὲν γὰρ ὁ ἐρχόμενος ἄλλον Ἰησοῦν κηρύσσει ὃν οὐκ ἐκηρύξαμεν ... καλῶς ἀνέχεσθε), and his references to his opponents as “very-super apostles” (ὑπερλίαν ἀπόστολοι, 11:5; cf. 12:11) are also sarcastic.

Although Paul’s concession that he is rhetorically untutored (ιδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ, 11:6) is self-deprecating, it is not *asteismos*.¹⁹ Paul has already cited criticism of his rhetorical abilities (10:10). Because Paul’s audience does not consider him rhetorically impressive, it is unlikely that they would have heard ιδιώτης τῷ λόγῳ in 11:6 as anything other than a literal concession.²⁰ We do however find *asteismos* in 11:8, where Paul claims to have committed the wrongdoing of stealing from other churches for the Corinthians’ benefit (ἄλλας ἐκκλησίας ἐσύλησα λαβὼν ὁψώνιον πρὸς τὴν ὑμῶν διακονίαν).

Another cluster of verbal irony occurs in 11:19–21. “For you gladly tolerate fools, clever as you are” (ἡδέως γὰρ ἀνέχεσθε τῶν ἀφρόνων φρόνιμοι ὄντες, 11:19) is sarcastic, with the list of abuses that the Corinthians “tolerate” in 11:20 driving home the point that the Corinthians’ forbearance here is anything other than “wise” (φρόνιμοι). Paul then closes with *asteismos*, ironically referring to himself as weak (ἡσθενήκαμεν) and as having behaved shamefully in not mistreating the Corinthians (κατὰ ἀτιμίαν λέγω, 11:21).

In 12:13b we find an interesting combination of sarcasm and *asteismos*. “Do forgive me this injustice!” (χαρίσασθέ μοι τὴν ἀδικίαν ταύτην) is an insincere apology. Because such a request for forgiveness would be a positive message if uttered sincerely, it is sarcastic in this case.²¹ At the same time, the fact that Paul ostensibly claims to have committed wrongdoing (ἀδικίαν) also qualifies the statement as *asteismos*.

Finally, Paul’s reference to himself as “being shift” (ὑπάρχων πανούργος) in 12:16, along with his claim to have tricked the Corinthians, represents another case of *asteismos*.

Second Corinthians 10–13 contains much verbal irony, with a slight prevalence of *asteismos* over sarcasm. Paul’s sarcasm aims to diminish the influence of his opponents, either targeting them directly (11:5; 12:11) or criticizing the Corinthians for accepting them (11:4; 11:19). Combined with self-deprecating

19 Contra Forbes, “Paul’s Boasting,” 17; cf. E. A. Judge, “Paul’s Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice,” in *Social Distinctives of the Christians in the First Century*, ed. David M. Scholer (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2008), 37–38.

20 See Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:677–678.

21 11:21 can also be read as a sarcastic apology insofar as it insincerely expresses regret for Paul’s “weakness.” It can therefore also be considered an example of both sarcasm and *asteismos*.

irony, Paul's use of sarcasm and *asteismos* creates a rhetorical combination of attack and self-defense that well-suits the apologetic thrust of the text.

Despite the prevalence of sarcasm and *asteismos* in 2 Corinthians 10–13, it would be inappropriate to consider the fool's speech an ironic discourse from the standpoint of verbal irony. Paul stops using verbal irony as soon as he begins his boasting in 11:21b. He does not use verbal irony again until 12:11b, which falls just after Paul self-consciously puts an end to his foolish boasting (12:11a). The fool's speech, as defined by where Paul actually engages in his foolish boasting (11:21b–12:10), therefore does not contain *eirōneia* as defined in the rhetorical and grammatical treatises written within Paul's historical context.²² Paul's foolish boasting does not make him an *eirōn* (εἴρων).

2 Situational Irony and Boasting in Weakness

Much of what we today describe as ironic fits into the category of situational irony. Compared to verbal irony, however, situational irony has received far less attention in scholarship. Cameron Shelley describes the phenomenon well in a dedicated study where he characterizes situational irony as involving three elements: bicoherence, salience, and the evocation of emotion.²³

We may unpack this definition as follows. "Bicoherence is most easily understood as the reverse of coherence."²⁴ Bicoherence occurs when two elements are set together that are incoherent with each other—that is, that do not fit together or otherwise clash—on a conceptual level.²⁵ Salience refers to how noticeable a phenomenon is.²⁶ Situational irony must also produce an emotional response, whether positive or negative. Salience and the evocation of emotion are mutually reinforcing, since the stronger the emotional response an event elicits, the more noteworthy and therefore salient it is.²⁷

We will use the phenomenon of boasting in weakness to illustrate this definition, which will also provide our first examples of situational irony in the fool's speech. Second Corinthians 11:23b–29 sees Paul boasting in the hardships

22 We will address the relationship between the fool's speech and earlier definitions of *eirōneia* in §2.

23 See Cameron Shelley, "The Bicoherence Theory of Situational Irony," *CS* 25.5 (2001): 778–785.

24 Shelley, "Bicoherence," 778.

25 Shelley helpfully lays out several different coherence relations that produce bicoherence and provides a taxonomy of bicoherent ironies ("Bicoherence," 778–783, 787–799).

26 Shelley, "Bicoherence," 783.

27 See Shelley, "Bicoherence," 783–785.

he has faced throughout his ministry. Here I agree with Jennifer Glancy that the sorts of beatings Paul mentions would have been considered shameful, of the sort inflicted on slaves and other marginalized people.²⁸ In short, Paul is listing real weaknesses.²⁹ 11:23b–29 is not the only example of boasting in weakness in the fool's speech. Paul describes both his escape from Damascus (11:32–33) and his thorn in the flesh (12:7–10) as weaknesses about which he will boast.³⁰

As a form of self-promotion, the act of boasting is incoherent with the highlighting of one's weaknesses. But not every instance of bicoherence qualifies as situational irony; we also require appropriate salience and the evocation of emotion. From the perspective of reception, the salience of a text that has been read and studied constantly for almost two thousand years is self-evident. Paul himself also draws his audience's attention to his boasting. The audience is told repeatedly that Paul is boasting (11:18; 12:1), that such boasting is foolish (11:1, 16–17, 21, 23; 12:11), and to notice the way that Paul chooses to boast in weakness (11:30; 12:5, 9).

28 Glancy, "Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11:23–25)," *JBL* 123.1 (2004): 107–135; cf. George Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), 547. Contra perspectives that see Paul's hardships as emphasising his strength and endurance of suffering (Robert Hodgson, "Paul the Apostle and First Century Tribulation Lists," *ZNW* 74.1–2 [2009]: 64–65, 80; John T. Fitzgerald, *Cracks in an Earthen Vessel: An Examination of the Catalogues of Hardships in the Corinthian Correspondence*, SBLDS 99 [Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988], 204; Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995], 450).

29 On Paul's integration of his marginal status into his boasting, see Ryan S. Schellenberg, "Paul, Samson Occom, and the Constraints of Boasting: A Comparative Rereading of 2 Corinthians 10–13*," *HTR* 109.4 (2016): 522–535.

30 Explaining the presence and function of Paul's narrating his escape from Damascus at this point in the text presents a number of interpretive difficulties—including the issue of whether and how it qualifies as an example of weakness (for discussion, see Victor Furnish, *11 Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB [Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1984], 540; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:763–765; Laurence L. Welborn, "The Runaway Paul," *The Harvard Theological Review* 92.2 [1999]: 116–122). More detailed treatment is warranted, especially of the suggestion that Paul might be engaging in a parody of the *corona muralis*, a crown given to the first soldier to ascend an enemy city wall and thus breach their fortifications (Edwin A. Judge, "Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice," *ABR* 16.1–4 [1968]: 47; Furnish, *11 Corinthians*, 533, 542; Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., WBC 40 [Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014], 574). I have dealt with this subject elsewhere (see Matthew Pawlak, "Paul's Escape from Damascus (2 Cor 11.32–3) and the *corona muralis*" *NTS* 68.2 [2022] 172–87). For the present discussion of situational irony it will suffice to recognize that Paul connects 11:30–31 with 11:32–33, and so considers his escape another example of weakness (see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:764–766).

That Paul's boasting in weakness is also emotionally evocative is not difficult to establish. Paul's list of sufferings in 11:23b–29 is extensive and emphatic; it has doubtless provoked a constellation of emotional responses in readers throughout the text's reception. Paul also highlights his own emotional reactions with his description of his sufferings, expressing concern (μέριμνα, 11:28)³¹ and "burning" with either anger³² or shame³³ (πυρούμαι, 11:19). We can therefore say with confidence that Paul's boasting in weaknesses is an example of situational irony.

Within Shelley's definition of situational irony, we may notice that salience and emotional response are subjective categories, potentially varying from person to person. Such variance becomes all the more likely when dealing with large chronological or cultural gaps such as the interpreter encounters when reading Paul's letters. This subjectivity is not a weakness in the paradigm, but an important reminder that situational irony is a matter of interpretation. A person may say or do something that can be assessed as situational irony without realizing that they have done so.³⁴ The presence of situational irony in a text does not therefore establish that the author is using irony. In the absence of further evidence that the author means to draw the reader's attention to the irony of the situation, it remains a strong possibility that the irony exists only in the eye of the interpreter.

When dealing with Paul's letters, it is essential not to conflate situational irony with *eirōneia*. As we have touched on briefly above, treatments of *eirōneia* as a figure of speech in rhetorical and grammatical texts written in and around Paul's day correspond roughly to the modern category of verbal irony rather than to situational irony. The meaning of *eirōneia* in earlier texts is complex, with the term initially referring to an act of deception before becoming associated with self-deprecation.³⁵ But *eirōneia* never refers to something like what we call situational irony.

31 See Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC 29 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1915), 330; Jean Héring, *La seconde épître de saint Paul aux Corinthiens*, CNT 8 (Neuchâtel: Delachaux & Niestlé, 1958), 90; Furnish, *11 Corinthians*, 538.

32 Furnish, *11 Corinthians*, 538–539.

33 Plummer, *Second Epistle*, 331.

34 Cf. Haiman, *Talk Is Cheap*, 20; Schellenberg, *Education*, 174.

35 Lane's excellent work on *eirōneia* in early texts traces this development and problematizes the association of the modern category "Socratic irony" with Plato's Socrates ("The Evolution of *Eirōneia* in Classical Greek Texts: Why Socratic *Eirōneia* Is Not Socratic Irony," in *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy xxxi: Winter 2006*, ed. David Sedley [Oxford: Oxford, 2006], 49–80; "Reconsidering Socratic Irony," in *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, ed. Donald Morrison [Cambridge: Cambridge, 2010], 237–257.

It would therefore be fallacious to describe situational irony in Paul, such as his boasting in weakness, as *eirōneia* or as contributing to the characterization of Paul as an *eirōn*. Where we see situational irony in Paul, it is also problematic to assert that Paul is being ironic or using irony. We should not assume *a priori* that Paul was conscious of the specific features in his writing that have led to the interpreter's perception of situational irony. At the same time, there may be scope to build an argument as to whether Paul means to draw the reader's attention to some incongruity and evaluate ways in which his writing might evoke emotion, such as we have done above with the case of boasting in weakness. Further research is needed to determine whether the modern category of situational irony maps onto a specific concept or constellation of terms in ancient Greek.

The following sections will assess passages within the fool's speech where scholars have noted the presence of irony, in order to determine whether they can be described as containing situational irony.

2.1 *Is Paul Boasting Ironically?*

This section approaches the issue of Paul's boasting from a different angle, assessing not the content of his boasts, but whether the act of boasting itself can be considered ironic. A number of scholars argue that Paul does not boast sincerely, but instead does so in imitation of his opponents. Loubser writes that Paul "pretends to equal his opponents in boasting."³⁶ Forbes states: "So far is Paul removing himself from the conventional attitudes of his opponents that, when 'forced' to boast, he will do so only ironically, in order to satirize precisely those kinds of achievements of which his opponents were most proud."³⁷

On such a reading, Paul's boasting would qualify as parody, a hyperbolic imitation of his opponents.³⁸ It would be insincere and an act of pretense. Lacking the inversion of affect, this sort of insincere boasting does not qualify as verbal irony—i.e., Paul's feigned boasting does not imply self-criticism. It would also be problematic to conceive of it as situational irony. Not every instance of insincerity, pretense, and parody is also ironic. Paul's claim that he will boast foolishly (11:17) in the same manner as others (11:18, 21) is not incoherent with his going on to boast as others boast in a parodic fashion. It would therefore be

36 Loubser, "Paradox and Irony," 514.

37 Forbes, "Paul's Boasting," 20; cf. Guthrie, *2 Corinthians*, 546, 568.

38 On the distinctions between parody and different forms of irony, see Roger J. Kreuz and Richard M. Roberts, "On Satire and Parody: The Importance of Being Ironic," *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* 8.2 (1993): 102–104.

better for scholars who subscribe to this interpretation to refer to Paul as boasting insincerely or parodically rather than ironically.³⁹

One may also read Paul's boasting as sincere, that Paul relates his weaknesses as part of a broader argument that they do indeed support his validity as an apostle. Paul may consider such boasting foolish (11:1, 16, 21, 23, 12:11), but his boasting is ultimately boasting and is done for the sake of self-promotion. There is no scope for situational irony in this reading. As Schellenberg writes, "[Paul's] boasting as a whole simply does not admit of an ironical reading. Paul explains exactly what he intends to do, and then he does it."⁴⁰

2.2 *An Ironic Vision?*

We now address Paul's vision, which he presents as the experience of a certain "man in Christ" (12:2).⁴¹ Whether we read this vision as an example of strength or weakness is determinative for the identification of situational irony in 12:1–4.

Some scholars have argued that Paul's vision is an ironic or parodic vision, another example of weakness. Paul's vision is old, occurring 14 years ago, and the vision itself produces no edifying revelatory content (12:4).⁴² When Paul writes that he "will boast about a man like that" (ὕπερ τοῦ τοιοῦτου καυχῆσθαι, 12:5 NIV), he is therefore again boasting in weakness.

This reading can be interpreted as situational irony in two ways. First, as we have already discussed, boasting in weakness is ironic. Second, the vision itself can be perceived as situational irony. If we assume that visions ought to

39 I have not here addressed whether Paul's appropriation of foolishness as a persona is ironic (so Hans Dieter Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition: eine exegetische Untersuchung zu seiner Apologie 2 Korinther 10–13* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972], 79–80; Hans-Josef Klauck, *2. Korintherbrief*, KNT [Würzburg: Echter, 1986], 86). Heckel argues that the term irony has been misapplied to Paul's playing the fool ("der Rolle und Maske eines Narren"), which is better understood as an instance of parody (Ulrich Heckel, *Kraft in Schwachheit: Untersuchungen zu 2. Kor 10–13*, WUNT 2.56 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993], 20–22). With both Paul's boasting and foolish persona, the question is whether Paul is being insincere and the extent to which he is imitating and parodying his opponents. None of these elements is inherently ironic.

40 Schellenberg, *Education*, 170. I am sympathetic to this interpretation, and have addressed the boasting of the fool's speech in relationship to other forms of self-promotion in Second Corinthians elsewhere (Matthew C. Pawlak, "Consistency Isn't Everything: Self-Commendation in 2 Corinthians," *JST* 40.3 [2018]: 368–371, 374–375).

41 On this vision as Paul's, despite the third-person narration, see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:778–779.

42 See Holland, "Speaking like a Fool," 262–262; Betz, *Sokratische Tradition*, 84–92; Andrew T. Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary: The Setting and Significance of the Rapture to Paradise in 11 Corinthians XII. 1–10," *New Testament Studies* 25.2 (1979): 208–209; Loubser, "Paradox and Irony," 515.

result in revelatory content that can be communicated to the broader community, a vision that reveals nothing is incoherent with the very idea of what visions ought to do. Such a vision is salient and emotionally evocative, as it grates against the perceived function of a religious experience. Interpreters who consider Paul's vision in 12:1–4 a “weak” vision may then also rightly call it ironic—as an instance of situational irony.

There is however a strong case to be made that Paul's vision is not an example of weakness. In a context where ecstatic spiritual experiences and works of miraculous power are a significant currency with his audience (1 Cor 12:9–10, 28–29; 1 Cor 14:1–19; 2 Cor 12:12)—even when they do not produce revelatory content accessible to the community (1 Cor 14:1–5, 18–19)⁴³—it is easy to see why this vision could be viewed as impressive. It is not only a profound experience of the divine,⁴⁴ but it also makes its recipient privy to revelation that the Corinthians cannot access (12:4).⁴⁵

Paul also has no trouble ascribing weaknesses to himself throughout his foolish boasting (11:23b–33). If his vision was another example of weakness, it seems very likely that Paul would have claimed it as his own. But Paul describes his vision in the third person, ostensibly distancing it from himself and giving every indication that it puts him in a privileged rather than weak spiritual position. In saying “I will boast about a man like that” (12:5 ΝΙΥ), Paul defines the vision as something worth boasting about, even if he claims this is something he will not do. Paul goes on to write, “And by reason of the extraordinary quality of the revelations, therefore, lest I should become elated with pride, there was given me a thorn for the flesh, an angel of Satan, to beat me, lest I become elated” (καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων, διὸ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, ἐδόθη μοι σκόλοψ τῇ σαρκί, ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ, ἵνα με κολαφίζῃ, ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι, 12:7).⁴⁶

43 On glossolalia as a mark of spiritual status in Corinth, see Dale B. Martin, “Tongues of Angels and Other Status Indicators,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59.3 (1991): 547–580; Joseph Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 32 (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 508–509. While glossolalia, miracles, and visions are different phenomena, it is difficult to conceive of the Corinthians as valuing one and not the others, especially in light of Paul's discussion in 1 Cor 12:4–31.

44 Paul describes his vision as bringing him into the presence of God (James Buchanan Wallace, *Snatched into Paradise* (2 Cor 12:1–10), BZNTW 179 [De Gruyter, 2011], 256–257, cf. 285).

45 Although Paul himself, on some level, understands the experience (Wallace, *Snatched*, 231). For discussion of why Paul cannot/may not communicate his revelation, see Wallace, *Snatched*, 259–263.

46 Translation and Greek text from Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:772, 806. For the arguments for and against connecting 12:7a to 12:7b, see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:802–805. While here I follow Thrall's reading, one may still see καὶ τῇ ὑπερβολῇ τῶν ἀποκαλύψεων (“the extraordinary quality of the revelations”) as relating to the διὸ (“therefore”) in 12:7b even

This statement ties the vision to Paul almost explicitly, rendering the pretense that he is talking about someone else's experience extremely thin.⁴⁷ It also further characterizes Paul's visionary experience as exalting him to the extent that he requires an irremovable affliction to keep him from arrogance.⁴⁸

Whether Paul feels compelled to boast of visions because of his opponents,⁴⁹ or whether he is simply aware that doing so would support his claim to authority in Corinth, 2 Corinthians 12 finds Paul in a position where his cause would be helped by relating a visionary experience. He has, however, begun boasting in weakness (11:23b–33) and intends to continue doing so (12:5). The way that Paul distances himself from his vision by describing it in the third person, while still going on to make clear that it is indeed his vision, enables him to relate an episode that functions straightforwardly to his commendation without technically breaking from boasting in weakness.⁵⁰

There is no verbal or situational irony in the transparent pretense underlying Paul's use of the third person in 12:2–5 to boast indirectly about a vision he portrays as worth boasting about. Such a vision is not ironic in and of itself, nor is it an example of boasting in weakness, which we have also defined as situational irony. We do not find situational irony again until Paul's discussion of his "thorn in the flesh" (12:7–10), which falls under the category of boasting in weakness.

if the former ultimately belongs in the same sentence as 12:6 (so Josef Zmijewski, *Der Stil der paulinischen „Narrenrede“: Analyse der Sprachgestaltung in 2 Kor 11,1–12,10 als Beitrag zur Methodik von Stiluntersuchungen neutestamentlicher Texte*, BBB 52 [Köln–Bonn: Peter Hanstein, 1978], 364; Heckel, *Kraft in Schwachheit*, 75).

47 Wallace notes that Paul's audience would not have known whose vision was being related until 12:6 and 7 (*Snatched*, 253–254).

48 On ὑπερβολή as referring to "the superior quality of the revelations that tempt Paul to be exalted," see Wallace, *Snatched*, 266. Note the emphatic repetition of ἵνα μὴ ὑπεραίρωμαι. On Paul's affliction, see Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:809–818.

49 Furnish, *11 Corinthians*, 543; Lincoln, "Paul the Visionary," 207–208; Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:772.

50 Scholars have advanced several explanations for Paul's use of the third person (see the list in Thrall, *Second Corinthians*, 2:781–782). The reading I outline here has some affinity to the position that Paul does not want his visionary experiences to be the basis of his apostolate (Zmijewski, *Stil*, 336; Furnish, *11 Corinthians*, 544). My reading, however, means to highlight that Paul's vision does support his authority in Corinth, and he relates it for this very reason, even if he will ultimately argue that it is his weakness that establishes the validity of his ministry. I also partially agree with the position that Paul uses the third person for modesty's sake (so Hans Windisch, *Der zweite Korintherbrief*, 9th ed., KEK 6 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924], 369–370; Héring, *Seconde épître*, 93n.1; Philip Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962], 429–430), insofar as Paul avoids directly boasting in strength when he has determined to boast in weakness.

3 Conclusions

We have now clarified where different forms of irony occur throughout 2 Corinthians 10–13. We find significant verbal irony in Paul's self-conscious discussion of his foolish boasting—including both sarcasm (11:4–5, 19, 21; 12:13) and *asteismos* (10:1; 11:8, 21; 12:13, 16). These examples of verbal irony qualify as *eirōneia* as described in the rhetorical and grammatical treatises of Paul's day.

Paul's foolish boasting itself does not contain *eirōneia*. Instead, the irony of Paul's boasting belongs to the modern category of situational irony, a form of irony in which incoherence between two phenomena provokes a marked emotional response. The content of Paul's boasts—namely, the fact that he is boasting in weakness—can be considered situational irony (11:23b–29, 32–33; 12:7–10). But we should not refer to Paul as “boasting ironically,” regardless of whether his boasting is sincere or parodic. I also argued that Paul's vision in 12:2–4 is portrayed as an impressive spiritual experience rather than an example of weakness and is therefore not an ironic vision.

Disambiguating forms of irony in 2 Corinthians 10–13 complicates the question of whether we may consider the fool's speech an ironic discourse. With *eirōneia* completely absent from Paul's actual boasting (11:21b–12:10), it would be inappropriate to consider the fool's speech an ironic discourse from an ancient perspective. Ancient discussions of *eirōneia* and the behavior of the *eirōn* (εἰρων) should not be the controlling paradigms for interpreting Paul's boasting. While Paul's boasting in weakness throughout the fool's speech qualifies as situational irony, the interpreter must be careful not to imply an unwarranted level of intentionality on Paul's part regarding a form of irony that is ultimately a matter of interpretation. We may read situational irony throughout much of the fool's speech, but we should not refer to Paul as “being ironic” or “using irony.”

The interpreter therefore cannot use the phenomenon of irony to distance Paul from the self-promotion in which he engages. The situational irony found in Paul's foolish boasting is not a sophisticated rhetorical apparatus that somehow puts Paul above his boasting, nor is it an implicit metacommentary critiquing the act of boasting itself. Even Paul's use of *eirōneia* does not imply the use of professional rhetoric or provide evidence for or against Paul having formal rhetorical training. One need not be an orator to be sarcastic or self-deprecating. Instead, in 2 Cor 10–13 Paul is an active participant in a lively and impassioned defence of his apostolic authority. Dealing with a difficult situation in which he has much personally at stake, he is as willing to engage in self-defence and self-promotion as he is to employ harsh criticism and protestations of affection.

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